

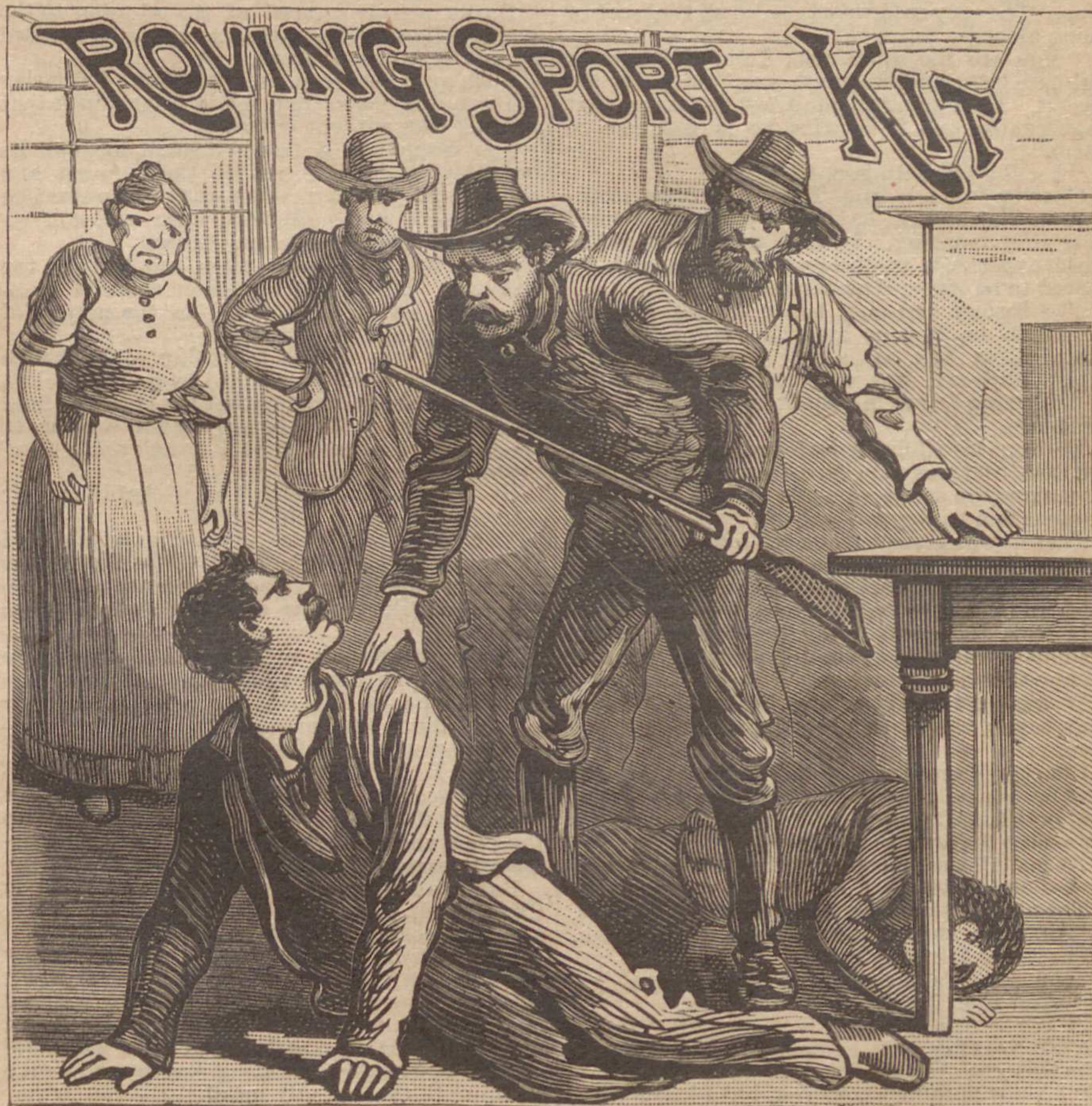
BEADLE'S POCKET Library

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No. 283, \$2.50
a Year.

Published Weekly by Beadle and Adams,
No. 98 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK.

Price, Vol. XXII.
Five Cents.



"WHAT IS THE MATTER?" ASKED BURKE WITH A DAZED LOOK.

Roving Sport Kit;

OR,

The Ghost of Chuckaluck Camp.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF "FEARLESS PHIL," "THE TYPO DETECTIVE," "FEATHERWEIGHT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SHOT ON THE SPOT.

"DON'T go in there, Charley."

"I will, though. Why not? There is a faro game going on there, and if I choose to risk a few dollars, I don't know why I should not. I am not likely to lose more than I can afford to."

"You don't know that, Charley. When a man begins, there is no saying where he will stop. The only safe way is to let all that sort of thing alone."

"You are too squeamish, Tom. Everybody out here bets, and we must keep up with the racket. I am going to put a few dollars on that man's game, and if he wins he is welcome to them."

"I will go in with you, then."

Charley Manson and Tom Ross were strangers in Chuckaluck, having "struck the camp" only that morning. In fact, they had had but little experience in the mining region, and deserved to be styled "tenderfeet."

The former had only lately reached the age at which he became his own master, and his friend Ross was but a few years older. The latter, however, was considerably in advance of his young friend in respect of steadiness and prudence.

He went into John Burke's bar-room, followed by Ross, and was soon seated at the table putting money in small amounts on one card and another in a haphazard sort of way.

There were three men on the same side of the table with him, and on the other side was seated John Burke, the dealer—a dark-featured man with an impassive countenance, who mechanically drew the cards from the box, and as mechanically raked in or shoved over the chips and money that he lost or won.

It was just as Tom Ross had said—when a man began, there was no saying where he would stop.

Charley Manson got excited in the game. At first he won slightly, and then he lost slightly, and both his winnings and his losings gave him an excuse to increase his stakes.

At last all the money he had with him was invested on the king.

The king lost and the dealer raked in the pile.

"Hold on there!" shouted the young man.

"That's not fair play."

John Burke's face was no longer impassive, but wore an evil and menacing smile.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that I am not playing this game fair? Do you know who it is you are speaking to?"

"I know nothing about you, but I know what I am saying, and I know unfair play when I see

it. I saw you draw two cards together from the box, and as you did it, you winked at the case-keeper. Do you call that honest?"

"You mean, then, young chap, to accuse me of cheating?"

"Of course I do. It is a swindling game and I demand my money."

Tom Ross, attracted by the altercation, stepped toward his friend to quiet him, but he was too late.

"You shall never make that charge again," said John Burke, as he drew a revolver and fired it across the table.

The bullet struck Charley in the left breast, and he fell back in his chair.

A few gasps and he had breathed his last.

"Do you want to take this up?" asked Burke, angered by the horrified expression of Tom Ross's countenance.

"No," replied Tom. "Harm enough has been done. You have killed this poor boy and it will be the death of his sister."

Burke merely sneered at the allusion to the young fellow's sister. He was not to be touched by any sentimental trash.

Such an occurrence as the killing of Charley Manson was not so frequent in Chuckaluck that it could pass without notice.

The camp was a new and small one, and its organization was as yet of the simplest and rudest kind. Indeed, there was no organization except such as the citizens, when occasion required, adopted for the time being.

There was no inquest upon the body of the stranger. That would have been considered unnecessary, and it was opposed to the notions of the Chuckaluck people.

The man was dead and nothing could change that fact. He had been killed by a pistol bullet, and there was no denying that the shot was fired by John Burke. The only question was as to the degree of Burke's guilt, if he had really committed a crime.

So he had a trial which was probably as fair a trial as the camp could afford.

Twelve citizens were selected as a jury, and Higgins, the landlord of the Globe Hotel, was appointed the judge. Tom Ross acted as prosecutor, and Burke was defended by one of his friends.

The circumstances attending the killing were proved just as they had occurred. There was no lying or false swearing, no attempt to show that the deed was done in self-defense. Everything was open and above-board.

Judge Higgins, who was the ornamental member of the court, had nothing to say beyond the words that were necessary to give the case to the jury, and when they retired Tom Ross confidently expected a verdict of guilty.

But he and his dead friend were strangers in Chuckaluck, Tom Burke was a popular citizen, and was regarded as a useful one. It would never do to have his business broken up by any stray tenderfoot who might happen to lose a little money on his game. It was the general opinion that a deadly insult excused, if it did not justify, the use of a deadly weapon with fatal effect. A charge of cheating was to such a man as John Burke a deadly insult.

"Not guilty," was the verdict of the jury.

"Not guilty of what?" demanded Ross, who was as much shocked by this verdict as he had been by the shooting.

"Not guilty of murder," replied the foreman.

"Of what is he guilty, then? Can a man kill another here in cold blood, and be guilty of nothing?"

"We don't see fit to argy that p'int with you, young man. We find him not guilty."

Tom Ross buried his friend, and in sadness and disgust turned his back upon Chuckaluck.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE.

THE death of Charley Manson caused only a brief excitement in Chuckaluck, and he had been forgotten by all but a few in the lapse of some three months, when there occurred such a sensation as startled the camp from its center to its extremities.

This was not a tragedy, but what may be called a spectacular piece, being nothing less than the arrival at the Globe Hotel of a very pretty young woman by the evening stage.

Women were scarce in Chuckaluck, and the few specimens of the sex who had straggled thither were much sought after, unattractive as they were. No pretty girl had yet set her dainty foot within the limits of the camp. As the new-comer was an unusually pretty girl, it is no wonder that she created a decided sensation.

Her arrival was known even before the stage reached the hotel, and the news spread with amazing rapidity.

In less than half an hour most of the inhabitants of Chuckaluck were collected in and about the Globe Hotel, and the barkeeper was obliged to call for assistance, and the landlord found his time was more than occupied in responding to the inquiries that were showered upon him on all sides.

Her fellow-passengers by the stage, who had actually traveled with her, had seen her face, and had heard her speak, were the lions of the evening. They had unlimited opportunities to poison themselves at the expense of others, and nothing was considered too good to set before them. In return for this festive liberality they were expected to gratify the curiosity of their entertainers, and they told all they knew about the fair passenger, and perhaps a little more.

The girl had registered as "Miss Belle Bush, Chuckaluck," and this was a cheering indication of an intention to remain.

She had then been shown at once to her room, which she had not left, and the roughest rounder in the camp would not have thought of intruding upon her privacy.

But the citizens of Chuckaluck were impatient. They had their rights, which ought to be respected. They wanted to know more about the fair stranger, and above all to see her.

The public demand became so strong, and the pressure upon Landlord Higgins was so heavy, that he presented himself at Miss Bush's door, and was admitted.

If she had excited the fervent admiration of

her fellow-passengers in her traveling attire, her appearance as Higgins then beheld her must have driven them frantic.

Her dress was very pretty and coquettish, just long enough to show a remarkably neat foot and ankle, and was tastefully touched off by bits of lace and other ornaments. Her dark brown hair, arranged just as it should be, was crowned by the "cutest" little cap imaginable. As for her bright brown eyes, her peachy cheeks, her ripe ruby lips, and her other charms that were manifest, they were enough to break the hardest heart in Chuckaluck.

"Beg pardon, miss," said the landlord, bowing awkwardly and blushing until his face was fiery red. "I am Mr. Higgins, who runs this hotel. Met you when you came, but mebbe you've forgot me."

"Oh, no," she replied, with a bright smile; "I don't forget so quickly as that."

"Of course you don't, miss. I wouldn't have bothered you, but the people are so excited."

"The people excited?" she exclaimed, with a half-frightened look and tone. "What is the matter?"

"Nothin' wrong, miss. Nothin' at all. It is you they are excited about—that's all."

"Excited about me? Why, Mr. Higgins, what have I done?"

"No harm in the world. Not a bit of harm. It is a blessin' to us all to know that you are here. Such an ornament to Chuckaluck is what we have been wishin' and prayin' for, ever so long, and now you've come, and we only hope you mean to stay."

"I have come here to locate," she replied.

"That'll be the biggest kind of news for the boys. But the fact is, Miss Bush, they want to see you. Jest hear 'em, now. They think I've been up here too long, and are gittin' jealous."

In fact, the voices of those below could be plainly heard, calling loudly for Higgins.

"Will they want to come up here?" she asked.

"No, miss. Not a bit of it. But they are half-crazy to git a look at you, and some of 'em seem to think you are an angel, just dropped out of the sky."

"I am no sort of an angel, Mr. Higgins, but, if they only want to see me, I am willing to please them. What shall I do?"

"Jest step down to the door and show yourself, only for two minutes. That will satisfy the crowd, miss, and I will be ever so much obliged."

"Lead on, then, sir."

Higgins led the way down-stairs, highly pleased with his success.

"Clear the track!" he shouted. "She's comin'! Git outside, all of you, whar you can take a squar' look!"

The house was quickly cleared, and all the eager crowd collected in front of the hotel door, when the young lady shortly appeared, preceded by the landlord.

She bowed as a storm of applause greeted her, and Higgins, lifting up his voice like a pelican in the wilderness, proceeded to make a speech.

"Feller-citizens of Chuckaluck: I have the honor to introduce to you Miss Belle Bush, as handsome and high-steppin' a critter as you might find in any of the States. [Applause.] I

also have the honor to inform you that she means to remain with us. She says that she has come here to locate. [Applause]. Yes, feller citizens, she has adopted as her future home the lively and enterprising camp of Chuckaluck, and we all know that we will be proud of her."

The young lady bowed in response to the cheers that followed this address, and disappeared before the applause ended.

Then the excitement of the crowd subsided somewhat; but it was not until she had been for some time sound asleep that all of her admirers had dispersed.

As soon as possible after her arrival Miss Belle Bush proceeded to prove the truth of her declaration that she intended to locate in Chuckaluck. Early the next morning she set out in search of a plot of ground.

Her progress on this errand of course created a commotion in the camp. Wherever she went she was followed by curious crowds; but they kept at a respectful distance, and were careful so to regulate their movements that they should not appear to be following her. Others stared at her from windows and doors, but did so stealthily and unobtrusively as if unwilling to be caught at it.

All this did not seem to disconcert her in the least, and she went about her business in a business way, noticing only those with whom she had business.

She was successful in her search. She bought and paid cash for it, a small piece of ground adjoining John Burke's place, and immediately made a contract for the improvements she wanted.

Burke's establishment had become a two-story building of quite an imposing appearance, with the saloon and arrangements for public gambling on the first floor, the second being occupied by a room for "quiet games" and by sleeping apartments.

Miss Bush's house was also to be a two-story affair, though smaller, and those who knew its plans declared that it would be an ornament to Chuckaluck.

So it proved to be. It was soon finished, as quick work was the style of Chuckaluck, and she had a way of hurrying things. Its gingerbread work excited the admiration of all, and three colors of paint set off its exterior finely.

It was christened before it was quite finished. By the common consent of the citizens of Chuckaluck it was called "The Chromo."

Another ornament was added—a sign.

A very nice sign it was, and it bore this inscription:

"BELLE BUSH,

"DEALER IN CIGARS AND TOBACCO."

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOST OF CHUCKALUCK.

It was not to be supposed that while this was going on Miss Bush had been allowed to pursue her way in peace.

A change had come over Chuckaluck since her arrival. The camp had spruced up. There were more clean faces and hands seen on the

streets, more clean shirts, and, it may be added, more sober men. The camp dressed more neatly, and absorbed its poison more secretly and in smaller doses. The admiration she excited showed itself in the natural way, and "the pleasant note of the pistol and the cheerful shriek of the victim" were heard less frequently. Chuckaluck rapidly advanced several degrees in civilization.

But it was to be feared that the fair cause of this improvement would yet turn out to be an angel of destruction, as her presence had already introduced into the camp an element of discord that was developing rapidly.

Her lovers—that was what was the matter.

All the camp was in love with her, as a matter of course; but there were some who carried their pretensions to a point that threatened to make trouble.

Pat Higgins, of the "Globe," thought that as his chance was the first it ought to be the best; but she snubbed Higgins.

Martin Aylward, the manager and part owner of the Chuckaluck Mine, which promised a fortune to every one interested in it, astonished all by the way he began to "sling on style," and paid marked attention to Belle Bush; but she did not seem to care for Aylward.

Lars Andersen, the Swedish storekeeper, who had "struck the camp" just in time to make a pile of money, was more than ready to endow Miss Bush with all his worldly goods; but he could not see that he made any impression upon her.

Tip Simmons, the Express agent, a brisk and natty young fellow with whom she had business to transact, took advantage of his opportunities to aim at her affections; but she treated Tip quite coolly.

Several others, who need not be enumerated—responsible citizens, and men with "no visible means"—were badly smitten with the prevailing epidemic; but not one of them could boast that he had made any progress toward the kind of cure he wanted.

Some of these victims were beginning to treat each other coldly and contemptuously, and that was a bad sign for the peace of the camp.

Last, but by no means least, John Burke had his eye upon her—both of them, in fact, and very sharp eyes they were.

He was probably more set in his purpose than any of them, though he seemed to show the fair object of all the attraction no special attention, treating her only with politeness, and making no attempt to force his presence upon her. He was so backward in coming forward that the others were justified in considering him out of the game.

But he did not consider himself out of the game. Not a bit of it.

His policy was made known to his general agent and confidant, Sam Byles, at a confab they had in an upper room of the "Gay and Happy," as his establishment was styled.

The craze of the camp about Miss Bush was naturally mentioned.

"I wonder that you don't take a hand in that game, major," remarked Byles.

John Burke had gained the title of "Major"

since his arrival in Chuckaluck, and it was Sam who had first given it to him.

"I am already in," replied Burke.

"It don't look like it."

"I am in, though, with a good pile to back me, and I mean to play my hand for all it is worth."

"It seems to me, major, that the pot is made up and you have passed out."

"That is because you don't understand the game. When those other fellows go broke, I expect to chip in and take the pile."

"I have known men to play a waiting game before now. They didn't lose, but they didn't win. One of the other fellers may win on a small pair, while you are staying out with a full hand."

"I think I know what I am doing, Sam. If that girl pans out according to the color she shows, I mean to make her my wife."

"But it takes two to make that sort of a bargain."

"Sometimes it does, and sometimes it don't. When I have made up my mind that I want her I shall set my pegs to get her."

He made no demonstration that way, however, previous to the day fixed for the opening of "The Chromo."

Various boxes and packages had passed from the Express Office to that ornamental building, and Miss Bush had left the "Globe" and established herself in her own home.

She had engaged a neat-handed Chinaman as her general household and business assistant—one of the numerous Sing family, Wo Sing by name—and with his help she had everything in order for the opening.

John Burke sent in from his place an offer to furnish his neighbor at his own expense with wine and other materials for a "grand blow-out," but his proposition was respectfully declined, Miss Bush saying that no people should poison themselves in her house with anything worse than tobacco.

The stock and fixtures of "The Chromo" made a fine show at the opening, the most attractive feature, of course, being the fair proprietress, and business was generally suspended in honor of the event.

Socially it was a great success, and as a business venture Belle Bush had every reason to be satisfied with it. Whatever price she chose to put upon her wares was paid more than cheerfully. Men bought cigars who had never smoked, and the demand for pipes and other smokers' articles threatened to swamp her stock.

All day the little store was crowded, and it was not until after dark that there was any cessation of the rush of business, and then it was on account of the absence of Miss Bush.

Wo Sing stated, in response to inquiries, that she had "gone Express Office."

As she was expected to return shortly, a crowd gathered and waited.

She had not returned when the monotony was broken by the sudden arrival of Caesar Augustus, a colored man, who was employed at the "Globe." He came running up the street at the top of his speed, and was evidently in a state of extreme terror.

One of the men in front of "The Chromo" seized him and brought him to a halt.

He was at once surrounded by eager questioners, who wanted to know what was the matter.

As he seemed to be unable to find a voice for replying, the usual Chuckaluck remedy for all complaints, a glass of whisky, was poured down his throat.

"'Fo' God, sah," exclaimed the frightened darky, "I done see'd a ghost!"

This declaration was received with a roar of laughter, and inquiries were freely made as to what he had been drinking.

"I was jess as sober, gen'lemen, as I ebber was, an' w'ot I see'd I see'd fur suah. I was walkin' out yonner toward the hills, sorter strollin' roun'—"

"Chickens, Caesar?" suggested a bystander.

"No, sah, it wasn't chickens, 'cause dar ain't no chickens out dar. I was jess strollin' aroun' by de light of de moon nigh de place whar dat young man was burried w'ot was killed in de ole 'Gay an' Happy' 'bout free munf ago. Mistah Burke reckomember dat young man."

"Shut up!" angrily exclaimed Burke.

"Yes, sah. Dat was de young man, I reckomembers him well, 'case he gimme a dollah. I was walkin' nigh his grave, an' I happened to look ober dar, an' dar I see'd dat young man standin' by his grave."

"Now, Caesar, that's too much," said one of the crowd.

"Yes, sah, it was too much fur dis niggah. 'Twar de dead boy fur shuah, standin' dar! I knowed him well, an' he was dressed jess as he was arter he was shot, an' dar was a big patch o' blood on his breast, an' oh, my!"

"What did you do, Caesar?"

"I gi'n a screech, an' turned an' ran inter de camp as fast as ebber I could run, an' so would any odder man."

Shortly after Caesar Augustus had finished his story Belle Bush reappeared in her store, having come in by the rear entrance; bus she was then too busy to discuss the alleged apparition.

"What do you think of that ghost story, major?" asked Sam Byles, when he and John Burke had returned to the "Gay and Happy."

"I don't bother my head a bit about it," replied Burke. "I wouldn't back the darky's word for a cent, and I don't believe in ghosts, either."

But there was one subject connected with the events of the evening in which he was interested. His jealousy had been aroused by the absence of Belle Bush from her place of business.

He went to the Express Office, and spoke to Tip Simmons, whom he found alone there.

"Tip, was Miss Bush in here to-night before ten o'clock? I don't want any lying about it, now, but the square truth."

"What do you mean by lying, major?" retorted Tip, bristling up.

"Come, sonny, don't get your ebenezer up. Of course you would lie for her, if she wanted you to, and you would be a poor cuss if you wouldn't. But I want to get hold of the straight thing on this."

"Is that the ticket, major? I thought you didn't care for her; but I reckon you are work-

ing the same lead with the rest of us. Well, sir, she has not been here to-night, nor anywhere near here, that I know of."

"She was away from her place quite awhile, and her Chinaman said that she was here; but I didn't believe him. I would like to know where she did go to."

"So would I."

"Good-night, Tip. If you ever want to play in anything at any game, come down to the 'Gay and Happy,' and I will see that you get a square deal."

As Belle Bush was about to close her door for the night, she was confronted by a tall man, who accosted her in the style of an old acquaintance.

"Is it you?" she asked, in a tone of surprise.

"Of course it is. Did you suppose I could keep away? You thought you had given me the slip when you passed through Deadwood; but I found out where you had gone to, and followed you. I want to have a talk with you."

"Very well; but not now. It is after business hours. Call in to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

KIT KENYON'S AIRS.

THE day after the opening of "The Chromo," Chuckaluck had another sensation in the appearance of Kit Kenyon.

He had arrived the night before, but did not "show up" until morning.

Though quite a young man—hardly more than twenty-five—Kit Kenyon had an established reputation in every mining-town and camp in that region. He had a way of happening in unexpectedly, and his advent always occasioned more or less excitement.

In person he was a splendid specimen of manhood. Fully six feet high, and admirably proportioned, his person was well set off by his dress, which was a mixture of the Mexican and American garb, always of fine material and elegantly fashioned.

His face, always cleanly shaved with the exception of a long dark mustache, was handsome to correspond with the rest of the man, and his piercing, coal-black eyes made him a remarkable person in any company.

He called himself a speculator; but his business, if he can be said to have had a business, was that of a gambler. That is to say, he professed to play merely for amusement, but seldom failed to get the best end of any game he took hold of. He was always flush of money, and was not known to have any other means of getting it than his "little games."

In character he was regarded as a dare-devil without being reckless. His courage was unquestioned, and he was known to be a sure shot and hard hitter.

His disposition was good enough, but he had an overbearing air and a supercilious manner that frequently brought him into conflicts that he would have preferred to avoid, and those ways of his were to some people quite insufferable.

His style proved to be very offensive to several citizens of Chuckaluck that morning.

As he sauntered down the street—swaggered,

his enemies would have said—he aroused the wrath of some men in a saloon whose frequenters drank early and often, and some of them determined to go out and "tackle him."

He saved them that trouble by stepping into the saloon, where he was encountered by Steve Darden, the bully of Chuckaluck, a tall, gaunt, beetle-browed and heavy-fisted fellow.

"I say, Kit Kenyon, do you think you own this town?" demanded Steve, in tones that plainly indicated that he was on the war-path.

"No, indeed," mildly replied Kenyon. "I don't pretend to be wealthy, but I am not quite so poor as that."

"Mebbe you don't think it wu'th ownin'?"

"Maybe I do. If you want to sell it, I will make you an offer. I have a five-cent piece which I found on the neck of a dead Digger Injun. It was the poor devil's only jewelry, and I kept it as a curiosity. I have no use for such a small coin, and will give it to you for your town."

"Think you're smart, don't you?" sneeringly replied Darden.

"No. Come to think of it, I am quite too liberal—throwing away my money. I have a sort of coyote pasture beyond here—a patch of sage-bush and sand—which I will give you for your town, if you will cart off the inhabitants."

This insult was too much for the citizens of Chuckaluck there assembled, and it was evident that they relied upon Steve Darden to resent it.

He was equal to the occasion.

"Feller-citizens," said he, "I reckon we've had enough o' this highfalutin' galoot. He thinks that he is the Amerikine eagle, and that he roosts high over all of us. He needs to be took-en down a few pegs, and I'm the man to do it. If he will put away his artilllery, I will give him a good frailin' for the honor o' Chuckaluck. If he won't—"

"But I will," quickly replied Kit. "You have your friends here to back you, and I am alone; but if I could have any show for fair play I would be glad to accommodate you."

"I will see that you get fair play."

All turned and stared at the person who arose from a dark corner and gave his assurance in a thin, wheezy voice.

He was something to look at, too, considering the contract he proposed to undertake.

A small man, not much higher than the bar-room counter, and only noticeable for his small size and his pinched face. He had been seated quietly in his corner, drinking nothing, speaking to nobody, and his presence had hardly been perceived.

"What can you do, little one?" asked Kit, as this strange creature came forward.

"Go on with your act, sir, and I will attend to the rest of the circus."

"I will try you," said Kenyon, and he unbuckled his belt, and laid his weapons on a chair.

Steve Darden did the same, and the two men faced each other.

"Now, Steve Darden," said Kit, "you think that I ought to be taken down a few pegs. You claim to be the bully of this camp, and I think you ought to be razeed for the good of the town. You don't dare to fight me on equal

terms in any shape. Where is that thrashing you promised me?"

The bully raised his big fists, but seemed to be in no hurry to use them.

He should have got his work in more quickly.

His opponent launched out his left, striking him fairly on the jaw and felling him to the floor.

Before Kenyon struck that blow he had edged toward the chair on which were his revolvers.

He quickly snatched them up and faced the crowd, expecting a rush from them in revenge for the fall of their champion.

"No need of that, Mr. Kenyon," quietly remarked the dwarf. "This is about as peaceable a crowd as ever attended a circus."

"There has been a mistake here," said Kenyon, as he buckled on his belt; "but fighting is in order before explanations. Get up, Steve, and give me your fist in a friendly shake. I have nothing at all against Chuckaluck. In fact, I like the place, and am proud of its improvement. As for the people, I don't know where I would go to scare up a better set. What put it into your head that I thought I owned the town?"

"You looked that way," sulkily answered the crestfallen bully.

"Then I must be a better looking man than I had supposed myself to be. If you ever see me looking that way again, just put it that I was built so, and can't help myself. Now, gentlemen, in the words of our great and only Grant, let us have peace."

"It is wonderful how Chuckaluck has improved," he went on; "but the neatest thing I have seen here is that gay little building down yonder."

He pointed at "The Chromo."

"I should proudly remark," replied the bar-keeper. "That is an institution that Chuckaluck is ready to go its pile on. It is only a cigar store, but it was built and is owned and run by the purtiest little woman that ever stepped foot in shoe-leather. We are all proud of her, and the whole camp is crazy about her."

"And you all want to marry her, and she can't marry but one of you. That looks as if it might make trouble. But that is a sweet little shop, and I must take it in."

As he passed out he touched the dwarf, who had followed him.

"I want to see more of you, little pard," said Kit, when they were outside. "You are small, but you are business all through. I knew it by the glitter of your eyes when you came to the front there. Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Jacob Nemo."

"Not Nemo, of Tebo?"

"Well, yes—I don't mind saying so to you."

"Who scattered destruction among the Danites in Utah?"

"I believe I worried them a little."

"I should say you did, and I am proud to know you. What are you doing here?"

"Just looking around."

"So am I. We may be of use to each other. See you later, little pard."

Kit Kenyon passed down the street, crossed it, and entered "The Chromo." It was well filled with customers, and Belle Bush was be-

hind the counter, busy as a bee. She gave him a slight look of recognition, and when he bought a cigar she put a bit of paper in his hand.

He opened it outside and read these words:

"Look in to-night after business hours. I have much to say to you."

Before the time arrived for Kit Kenyon's interview with the mistress of "The Chromo," there was another sensation at that establishment, and at about the same hour as that of the previous night.

The usual crowd was there, within and without, when Martin Aylward, the manager of the Chuckaluck Mine, came riding up the street at a gallop, and hastily dismounted in front of "The Chromo."

"What is the matter with you, Aylward?" demanded John Burke, observing his blanched face and agitated air.

"I have seen a ghost," he huskily replied.

This time there was no roar of laughter in response to such an absurd statement; but the usual remedy was used to give him voice and nerve.

"I was riding in from the mine," he said, "and of course I had to pass the place where that young fellow was buried—the fellow you shot, Burke, as you remember."

"Confound the fellow!" angrily exclaimed the proprietor of the "Gay and Happy."

"So say I. He has given me what I may call a twist. I happened to be looking toward his grave and there I saw him standing. He was dressed just as he was when I saw him stretched out, and there was a big blotch of blood on his breast and his face shone like fire. I don't know which was the worst scared, my horse or me; but he started off like a shot, and never stopped until I held him up here."

While the others were pressing Mr. Aylward for more details of the supernatural occurrence, John Burke turned and entered the cigar store, where he looked about for Belle Bush. She was not there. Only the Chinaman was behind the counter.

"Where is Miss Bush?" demanded Burke.

"Gone Express Office," blandly answered Wo Sing.

"You lie, you heathen, just as you did last night. Where is she, say?"

"Gone Express Office," meekly replied the heathen, his face beaming with smiles.

John Burke was on the point of making an angry rejoinder; but he perceived that he was making a spectacle of himself, and walked rapidly away to the "Gay and Happy."

"What do you think of the ghost story now, major?" asked Sam Byles.

"Nothing at all. It is nonsense."

"But Martin Aylward is a sober and respectable man, solid, and of good judgment, and he tells the same story that the darky told."

"Martin Aylward is a white-livered coward. Each of them may have seen something out there; but my common-sense tells me that it can't be a ghost. I mean to look into the matter myself, Sam. I am going out there to-morrow night. Don't say a word about it, but leave me alone to settle the ghost mystery."

CHAPTER V.

"PARTNERS."

WHEN Kit Kenyon presented himself at "The Chromo" that night he was instantly admitted and had the satisfaction of believing that he had been waited for and watched.

Belle Bush wore a smiling face, and was as pretty as a picture.

She introduced him into a neatly-furnished room at the rear of the store, where the tall and handsome young man seemed to fit the surroundings admirably.

"So you followed me?" she said.

"Of course I did, as I told you," replied Kit. "When I came across you on your way to this neck of woods, and when I had the honor of protecting you from a scamp who had insulted you—"

"Now, are you going to bring that up?"

"Oh, I don't bank on that at all. It was a lucky chance for me, because I formed your acquaintance—that's all."

"I was grateful to you, Mr. Kenyon, and still am; but I could have defended myself."

"I believe you could; but I happened to save you the trouble, and was glad of it. You refused to tell me where you were going; but there was something that would not let me lose sight of you, and here I am. But I can't yet reckon it up what has brought such a girl as you—a young lady, I should say, and a real lady at that—by her lone self, so far from civilization, and into such a place as Chuckaluck."

"Did you follow me here out of curiosity, then?" she asked.

"No, Miss Bush; it wasn't curiosity. It was something better than that. I have heard since I came here that the whole camp is crazy about you, and I have added another lunatic to the lot."

"Now, Mr. Kenyon, if we are going to be friends, please don't talk in that style."

"If we are going to be friends. Well, nothing could make me your enemy, and I hope that you may never be mine. To hold your friendship I will mind you as well as I can. I only wanted you to understand that it was not curiosity that made me follow you. But I would really like to know, Miss Bush, what your little game is."

"My little game? What do you mean, sir? I am no gambler."

"I think you understand me when I speak of your little game. I am wondering what brought you here. I can't believe that you came so far, and to such a God-forsaken place as Chuckaluck, merely to start this cigar store. There may be money in it; but you could have made money nearer home. You are not hunting a husband here, as that demand could be better supplied in a better market. I can't guess what you are at."

"Why are you so anxious to know?"

"Because I can be of use to you. Whatever your little game is, no man in this range can help you to play it better than I can, and no man could be more willing."

She looked at him closely and keenly, and appeared to be satisfied with the result of her inspection.

"Well, Mr. Kenyon," said she, "I admit that I have a little game, and you may know more about it before long. We are friends; are we not?"

"Friends? As far as I can say so we are friends most decidedly."

"And partners?"

"Partners?" exclaimed the young man, suddenly rising. "Please say that again."

"Partners in some things. And we can trust each other, and I will call you Kit, and you shall call me Belle."

"Hear me, then, Belle! I swear to you, by all I hold sacred, that whether you smile or frown on me, I will be true as steel to you; that I will think for you and work for you; that I will live for you, and will die for you if that should be needed; that you may depend on me in all things, and I will be your faithful friend and partner!"

She leaned back in her chair, and took him in with her two bright eyes.

He was, indeed, a splendid specimen of manhood as he stood there, and she could not help acknowledging that fact. Her look showed that she felt that here was one who was both able and willing to aid and defend her; one upon whom she could rely in any extremity, and to any extent.

"It is understood then," she said. "We are friends, and will trust each other. Now, Kit, if you really care for me, and want to help me, I will give you a job that you can go to work on as soon as you please."

"What is that, Belle?"

"You play cards?"

"I may say that I do considerably."

"You play a smart and successful game?"

"Well, I believe I have climbed pretty near to the top of that ladder."

"Then, Kit, I want you to play with John Burke and break him."

"What! the major? Burke of the 'Gay and Happy!'"

"That is the man."

"Is he one of your lovers, Belle?"

"Not that I know of. He has given no sign of such good taste."

"He was asking after you very particularly to-night, and was cursing your Chinaman for a liar."

"I heard of that. Will you take the contract, Kit?"

"Of course I will; but he is a tough subject to tackle. I won't be able to worry him with anything but poker, and will have to find a partner for that. Who shall I get, now? Oh, yes, the very man. He is a sharp hand at poker, and will suit me if he will go in with me."

"Who is that, Kit?"

"A queer name and a queer man—Jake Nemo."

"He will do."

"Do you know him, Belle?"

"I have seen him. Now, my friend, it is late, and I must ask you as a favor to trot along. Win all you can from Burke and come to me and report progress."

"I will play him for all he is worth. Good-night, Belle."

As Kit Kenyon walked up the street he held his head so high, and had such a lofty and arrogant air, that any citizen of Chuckaluck would have been justified in "jumping" him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAJOR SEES THE GHOST.

KENYON made no attempt to carry out his contract the next day. John Burke was not in the habit of playing "quiet games" in the daytime, and when night came he was not to be found at the "Gay and Happy."

He had, in fact, fulfilled his intention of going to interview the ghost of Chuckaluck.

He had declared his purpose to no person but Sam Byles, and would not have spoken of it even to him if he had not wished to use him.

"I want you to keep guard for me, Sam, while I am gone," he said, as he examined the cartridges in his revolver.

"Guard what?" inquired his confidant.

"I want you to keep an eye on 'The Chromo' and notice whether Miss Bush goes away. If she does, I would like to know where she goes to."

With this injunction he put his pistol in its place and sallied out.

"Queer that the major don't make up to that girl," muttered Sam Byles. "It is easy to see that he is struck on her, because he is dead gone with jealousy. Well, I will watch her a bit; but I won't dog her for him or any other man."

It was a fine night for ghost-hunting, cloudy and very dark. Caesar Augustus had said that he was strolling by the light of the moon when he saw the apparition, but there was no sign of a moon when John Burke set out on his ghostly errand.

The dark and lonesome journey, with a ghost expected at the end of it, was enough to try the nerves of most men, but the major was not the least bit nervous. A big, strong, and hearty man, he prided himself on his indifference to danger, and his coolness under all circumstances.

If he felt a little queer as he approached the place where Charley Manson was buried, there was nothing to show that he felt so.

He stood at the side of the road and looked into the darkness, with the purpose of fixing the exact locality of the grave.

This was easily did, as he knew the spot well, and he inwardly dared the ghost to appear.

It accepted the challenge!

Suddenly a strange white light shone upon the spot at which he was gazing.

Then, as if it had come out of the ground, a form arose before him, startlingly visible in the strange light.

It was the face of a young man, dressed just as Charley Manson was dressed when he was murdered, just as he was dressed when he was laid in his grave, and with a patch of blood on his left breast.

John Burke knew that figure well. He had never forgotten it, and in his dreams he had seen it again and again, and had wondered why it should haunt him.

But the face—that was the crowning horror.

It was Charley Manson's face, but livid and corpse-like, and shining vividly with a strange white fire. Lambent flames seemed to leap from its eyes, and its entire appearance was utterly unearthly.

John Burke had often boasted of his strong nerves, and he was, indeed, endowed with plenty of brute courage; but now he was seized by a sudden terror, a deathlike chill took possession of his whole body, and a feeling of faintness overwhelmed him so that he was unable to lift a finger.

As the apparition raised its hands, and seemed to be on the point of advancing toward him, he fell upon the ground in a heap, and his senses left him.

When he came to himself he was damp and chilly, perhaps with dew, perhaps with his own cold perspiration, and when he rose to his feet he found himself so weak and tremulous that he could hardly stand.

He cast a hasty glance at the grave; but the apparition that had overcome him was no longer there.

He looked at his watch by the light of a match, and was surprised to see how late it was.

Then he pulled himself together, shook his legs and arms, cursed himself for a cowardly fool, and walked toward the camp as fast as his weak and stiffened limbs would allow, never stopping until he brought up at the bar of the Gay and Happy.

Sam Byles found him there, and his curiosity was aroused.

"Did you see it?" whispered Sam.

"Come with me," replied the major, leading his confidant to a quiet corner.

"I saw something," he continued. "Yes, I saw something, and it may have looked like a ghost from a distance; but when I tried to get near it there was nothing there."

"What do you suppose it was, major?"

"That is too much for me. It must have been some sort of I don't know what. I have heard of such things before now, and scientific men give them a long name."

"Then you don't think it was a real ghost?"

"Why, of course not. I say, Sam, did you keep an eye on The Chromo?"

"Yes."

"Was she away?"

"Yes, as much as two hours."

"Where did she go to?"

"Now you've got me. She must have sneaked off by the back way, as I didn't see her light out, and only know that she was gone by missing her. I asked the Chinaman, and he said that she was 'gone Expless Office.'"

"The heathen lied. I wish you had kept track of her, Sam, because—because—of this ghost business."

"The ghost business! Why, major, what in the name of delirium tremens has she got to do with the ghost business?"

Sam Byles evidently thought that the hardest head in Chuckaluck had gone crazy.

"Now, Sam," replied the major, "I think I know what I am saying. I am not often picked up for a fool. I can put this and that together as well as another man, and I do say

that there is something queer about that ghost business."

"Of course; but what has the Chromo girl got to do with it?"

"That's where the queerness comes in. You know as well as I do that we never heard of any ghost until after she came here."

"Some time after, major."

"Well, as soon as she got settled down in The Chromo there, the ghost trouble began."

"That is too much!" exclaimed Byles. "If the Chuckaluck Mine should peter out, you might as well say that she had done it, because it happened after she came here."

"You don't see the point, Sam. When that nigger saw the ghost, she was away from her place, though it was opening day. When Martin Aylward saw it, she was away again, and to-night you tell me that she had skipped out. Each time her Chinaman lied, and said that she had gone to the Express Office."

"Just because that happened so, major, do you mean to say that she has been playing ghost?"

"It surely looks to me as if she is trying to run some sort of a rig in Chuckaluck."

"And you think that such a girl as that would sneak off, on a dark night, all alone, and tramp out to that grave, to play ghost and run the risk of getting shot? Durned if I would like to try it. Perhaps you can tell me why she should do such a trick."

"I haven't gone that far yet, Sam; but I mean to find out."

"You had better first find out whether you are right as far as you have gone."

"I mean to. I will ask her to walk out there with me to-morrow night."

"What! alone with you?"

"Well, I will take you along if she wants more company. If she refuses to go, I will know what to think. If she goes, and the ghost don't show up, I shall be sure that she has been playing tricks."

"So you will have the deadwood on her, anyway, if the ghost doesn't choose to come to time. Well, major, I hope you will have a heap of fun, with your little game. But just now there is something else on hand. Two men have been looking for you to-night, keen to play poker with you, and they are up-stairs."

"Who are they?"

"Kit Kenyon and a stranger."

"That is right into my hand. I feel just in the humor for a big game. Come on, Sam, and we will give them all they want."

Up-stairs they found Kit Kenyon, and with him was Jake Nemo, whom Kit introduced as "Mr. Samson."

A game of "draw" was soon arranged, and the four men seated themselves in a private room, where the play was kept up until daylight.

It was emphatically a "big game, with no limit, such as would have surprised even the reckless gamblers of Chuckaluck."

When the players at last rose from the table, John Burke was astonished at the extent of his losses. He had been betting so wildly and bluffing so unreasonably that Sam Byles was more than ever convinced that he was "off his head."

"Mr. Samson's" winnings were light, but Kit Kenyon left the room with his pockets loaded with gold and notes.

"You were too much for me this time, Kit," said Burke. "I do not know when luck has run against me so. But you must come again, and give me a chance to get even."

"All right," replied Kit. "I will be glad to accommodate you."

CHAPTER VII.

STANDING THE TEST.

BELLE BUSH had been in her cigar store all day, quietly attending to business, and smiling as she was stared at and rudely complimented by many men.

Toward evening the rush of custom had subsided, and at last she found herself alone, as Wo Sing had gone to prepare supper in the shanty kitchen back of the house.

Just then, as if he had been watching for such an opportunity, Kit Kenyon stepped in, and she introduced him into the rear room.

"I have come to report progress," he said. "I have succeeded better than I expected. That Jake Nemo is immense. He can do whatever he wants to with cards, and he played into my hand splendidly. Here's the spoils."

He pulled from his pockets rolls of notes and handfuls of gold, which he emptied into her lap.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed. "You have indeed made a haul. But why do you show all this to me? Do you want me to count it?"

"Just as you please about that. I want you to have it, that's all."

"Why, Kit, you must not give me your money. I can't accept it. Take care of it yourself."

"It is yours, Belle, more than mine. It was you who made me play for it, and your luck that made me win it. It is of no use to me, and I would be sure to throw it away. I have kept enough for a stake, and mean to leave that pile here, anyhow."

"If you insist upon it, Kit, I will deposit the money with Rosenheim and Troutman, and will keep it in trust for you. By the way, I am to have a visitor to-night, and am going to walk with him."

"With him? Who's the him?" demanded Kit.

"John Burke."

"Has he become one of your lovers, then?"

"He has never spoken to me except in the way of politeness or of business, and never alone. Does that look like a lover?"

"How do you know that he is coming here to-night?"

"Can't you see that my house is close against the Gay and Happy? Of course I am smart enough to find a way of listening if I want to."

"No doubt of that; but I don't know why you should want to. Would you walk out with me at night, Belle?"

"I would greatly prefer not to."

"But you are going with Burke."

"Yes, and I have a good reason for doing so. Can't you trust me?"

"Of course I can trust you, and now I will take myself out of the way. But I will strike Burke all the harder for this when I get a chance."

"That is what I want you to do, and I want you to trust me, Kit."

That night John Burke did call at The Chromo. He asked to see Miss Bush alone, and was immediately invited into the rear apartment.

For such a big and strong man he seemed to be very bashful, not to say timid, and he was slow in getting at the object of his visit.

"I hope you consider me a friend of yours, Miss Bush," he said, at last.

She was sitting bolt upright and looking him direct in the eyes; but there was a hard and fixed expression in her face that was quite different from the smiling countenance she usually wore.

"I hope that all Chuckaluck is friendly to me," she replied.

"You may be sure of that; but I am your neighbor, and I want to be a good friend, as well as a good neighbor. There's nothing I wouldn't do to help you, if you should ever get in a pinch."

"Thank you, Mr. Burke."

"And now I want to ask a great favor of you. I want to know if you can trust yourself with me to take a walk to-night?"

"Chuckaluck is hardly the place for a girl to walk out in at night, Mr. Burke."

"But I will take care of you, and this is a particular matter. You have heard of the ghost that has been seen about here?"

"Oh, yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"I have never believed in ghosts; but there seems to be something queer about this one."

"There is something queer about it, Miss Bush, and I am very anxious that you should walk out there with me to-night, and see if it will appear to us."

The color came into her cheeks, and she looked at him more closely than before.

"That is a strange request to make," she said, "and I hardly know how to answer it. If there is such a thing as a ghost, I would dearly love to see one, though I suppose it would frighten me out of my wits. Yes, I would like to walk out there to-night; but it is not exactly the thing to go with you alone."

"If you want more company, Sam Byles will go with us."

"It is agreed, then, and you may count on me for the ghost-hunt. Come around here to the back door when you are ready, and we will slip off quietly, as all Chuckaluck need not know what we are about."

John Burke went away highly pleased with his success, and after a little while he presented himself at the back door of The Chromo with Sam Byles.

Belle Bush was ready, and the three set out together, skirting along the rear of the houses that lined the main street of Chuckaluck, until they had fairly passed the town, when they struck into the road that led to the hills.

Though the night was dark, the journey was not a lonesome one to Burke this time; yet he was unaccountably nervous, and he talked rapidly and continually, as if to keep his spirits up.

Belle was quite willing to let him monopolize the talking, and contented herself with briefly answering his questions.

Sam Byles found occupation enough in gazing at the girl and thinking of the ghost, and was unusually silent.

As they approached Charley Manson's grave the major was less talkative, and when they reached the spot he had little to say for himself.

"There is the grave," he said, pointing off into the darkness.

"You seem to know the place right well," remarked Belle Bush.

"But where is the ghost?" inquired Byles.

There was nothing visible which the wildest imagination could mistake for a ghost—nothing but thick darkness in the direction of the apparition's favorite haunt.

"It may show up after awhile," replied Burke. "I had been here as much as ten minutes before I saw it last night."

"You have seen it, then?" quickly asked Belle.

"I have seen something; but of course I don't believe in ghosts."

They waited fifteen minutes or more, and the major, as no ghost appeared, recovered his spirits and his nerve, and even began to joke about the matter.

"The ghost is a fraud, or is very obstinate," said Belle. "Perhaps it is not fond of so much company. I am tired of this and want to go home."

The grave was in an open place in the timber at the left of the road. At the right the ground sloped away steeply, forming a valley that was not rough enough to be called a ravine, though there was a rocky bluff on the other side.

As Belle turned away, she sauntered to this side of the road and casually looked down into the valley.

Suddenly she uttered a scream that brought her two companions to her side.

"What a strange light!" she exclaimed. "Look there!"

It was down in the bottom of the valley, at the foot of the bluff, perhaps a hundred yards from where they were standing, and was just such a weird and unnatural light as Burke had seen shining about Charley Manson's grave before the specter appeared to him.

As they watched it, the scene quickly changed.

Before their eyes arose a ghastly form—the same which Burke had seen the night before; the same which had been described by Cæsar Augustus and Martin Aylward.

Belle shrieked, covered her face with her hands, and turned away.

Sam Byles, with his eyes bulging out of their sockets, looked as if he had been petrified on the spot.

John Burke was not overcome by the apparition this time. Encouraged by the presence of his companions, as well as by the distance of the thing, he was quite himself, with the exception of an excusable nervousness.

He cocked his pistol, took aim at the ghostly form in the valley, and fired.

It might have been that the mark was too far away, or it might have been that his hand trembled. The apparition did not seem to be affected by the shot.

A peal of demoniac laughter resounded through the valley, and the vision vanished.

"It is gone," said Burke. "Come, let us get back to the camp."

Willingly enough they turned and walked away with him.

"That was frightful indeed," said Belle.

"Was it the figure of the young man you shot, Mr. Burke?"

"I suppose so," he growled.

"But you did not shoot it as you shot him?"

"It seems not."

"Yet it had no chance for its life, just as he had no chance for his life?"

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way!" he gruffly replied. "This is a serious matter. I don't understand it, and it worries me."

When they reached Chuckaluck Belle Bush bade her companions good-night, and entered The Chromo, and they turned into the Gay and Happy.

"What do you think of the ghost now, major?" asked Sam Byles.

"Did you see it, Sam?"

"I should say I did!"

"Then it was the real thing."

"A good bit too real to suit me. But do you still think that the Chromo girl had anything to do with it?"

"How could she? She was with us all the time. I must confess that I don't know what to make of it, Sam."

"Well, there's no use going into the dumps about it. Suppose we have a game of poker. Tim says that Kit Kenyon and his pard are lay-in' for us ag'in."

"Let us go and tackle them."

They did tackle them, and again John Burke lost heavily, and again Kit Kenyon carried off the lion's share of the winnings.

CHAPTER VIII.

KIT KENYON'S GHOST-HUNT.

THE morning after her adventure with the ghost, Belle Bush was waited on by Kit Kenyon, who said that he had come to report progress, and placed in her keeping another pile of notes and gold.

"This is wonderful!" she exclaimed. "I never heard of anything like it. How can you have won so much money from such a player?"

"It beats me, too," replied the young man. "But the fact is that the major is the worst demoralized man I have seen in a long time. His play is fearfully wild and reckless. My luck has been something tremendous, too, and, with Jake Nemo to play into my hand, I can do just what I please."

"Can John Burke stand any more such losses?"

"I believe he is cleaned out, so far as cash goes. So you got home safe last night, Belle?"

"Yes, quite safe."

"I knew that you were safe."

"How did you know that, Kit?"

"I was there. I followed you, and never lost sight of you until you got back."

"You had no right to follow me, Kit Kenyon."

"I was bound to take the right when your safety was concerned, and you may bet high that I always will take it."

"Did you see the ghost?"

"No, but I judged that you were looking for it. I noticed a little excitement at the side of the road, and heard a pistol-shot. I came near stepping up and looking into the matter; but the excitement died away, and I followed you back to town."

"Burke shot at the ghost," remarked Belle.

"And didn't hit it, of course. I am going out there to-night to take a look at the critter, if it is on exhibition."

"Are you going alone?"

"I suppose so."

"I wish you good luck, Kit."

But after he left The Chromo, Kenyon changed his mind about going alone in search of the ghost.

He went to John Burke to whom he explained his purpose, and requested the pleasure of his company on the expedition.

Burke frowned and growled and his answer was decidedly in the negative.

"I don't believe in ghosts," said he, "and if I did believe in them, I would keep as far away from them as I could. But I hope you may have as good luck in ghost-hunting as you have lately had at poker."

The young man applied to Sam Byles, but with no better result.

"No more of that for me," replied Sam. "I have been there, and have had enough. If you do see the ghost, Kit, I hope you may tackle it for a game of draw, and get flaxed."

"I will go alone, then," said Kenyon. "Perhaps the thing will be more likely to come to time than if I had company."

He did go alone, and had a pleasant night for the adventure. There was no moon; but there were also no clouds, and consequently it was not near as dark as it had been when John Burke went in search of the apparition.

When he reached the place where Charley Manson was buried, he looked for the ghost, but it did not appear.

He waited in the road for some time, and looked down into the valley at the right, but saw nothing that could suggest any sort of an apparition.

He walked across to the grave, and stood near it in the attitude of Napoleon at St. Helena, thinking of what he had heard of the death of young Manson, and of the supernatural manner in which he appeared to pursue his murderer.

As he stood there, lost in a reverie, he heard a slight rustling or whirring sound in the air, such as might be caused by the flight of a night bird.

The next instant something fell over him, and he was violently jerked backward, falling helplessly upon the ground. He knew at once that he had been lassoed. The rope pinioned his arms to his sides so that he could make no effort to extricate or defend himself.

Two men rushed out from the timber and seized him. In a few moments they had bound him securely, and then a third came forward, bringing the end of the lariat.

These men were masked, but it was clear that they belonged to the worst class of "toughs."

When Kenyon asked them the meaning of the outrageous attack, they proceeded to make it plain by going through his pockets. The search yielded a roll of bills and a few coins, the whole amounting to not more than one hundred dollars. There could be no doubt that they had expected to find more, as the exhibit caused them to curse vigorously.

After a brief consultation they raised Kenyon to his feet, and led him away through the timber.

It was a rather rough route which they compelled the captain to travel; but they soon came to the end of it, halting at the foot of a hill, at the mouth of what appeared to be an abandoned mine.

In fact, it was the old Hard Luck Mine, where a great deal of money had been sunk in running a tunnel into the hill, without finding enough pay ore to even satisfy a "mining expert."

The three men entered this tunnel with their prisoner, and followed its straight course until they came to the main chamber, from which drifts had been started in three directions, in the hope of striking a fissure-vein or pocket.

Into one of these drifts they turned, and there they soon built a fire with the fragments of timbering that were scattered about.

As the hole was both damp and dark, the warmth and light of the fire were welcomed by themselves as well as by their captive.

"Well, boys, what next?" mildly inquired Kit Kenyon, after he had made himself as comfortable as the circumstances would allow.

"We want money—that's w'ot we're arter," replied the leader of the party.

"Well, you've got all that I had. Don't that satisfy you?"

"Not by a durned sight! Ef you don't kerry more'n that, it's mighty queer."

They subjected the captive to a more thorough search than they had yet made, but the closest examination failed to disclose any more lucre.

"W'ot hev you done with it, anyhow?" demanded the leader.

"Done with what?" replied Kit.

"Done with all your money. We happen to know that you've been winnin' a big pile from Major Burke at the Gay and Happy, and it ain't your style to soak money away in any bank but a faro bank. Whar is that money?"

"So *that's* your game?" replied Kit, with a smile. "You fellows are remarkably well-posted about my business and my habits, and how you got hold of so much information puzzles me. I did win some money from John Burke, but you can bet your lives that it is safe, and where you will never touch it."

"Don't you be too sure o' that, my gay rooster. When we start to do a thing we're mighty apt to do it. That money ain't fur from Chuckaluck, an' we want you to fix things so's we kin git it."

"It is a pity that I can't accommodate you, my friends; but such is the melancholy fact."

"You don't want to put on too many airs, young man. We mean to git our hands on that

money afore you git outen this hole in the ground."

"Then I am in for a long spell, and must take things as easy as I can. Send out for beefsteak and a bottle of champagne, and I think I can stand it."

"When you git any o' them fancy fixin's jest let us know."

Kit Kenyon resigned himself to his fate with considerable equanimity, considering the uncomfortable nature of his position and surroundings. He passed a rather unpleasant night, and was obliged to admit in the morning that his rest had not refreshed him.

His captors had some bacon and bread, procured from he knew not where, and he was glad to take a snack with them by way of breakfast.

After a while the fire burned low, and all the timber in the drift that was available for fuel had been burned up.

"Joe," said the leader, "go out and git some wood to burn."

Joe went out, and the others waited for him fully half an hour; but he did not return.

"Durned queer w'ot's become o' Joe," remarked the leader. "Tom, I reckon you'd better go out and hunt him."

So Tom went out to hunt up Joe, but his absence was also unreasonably prolonged, and the fire was getting very low.

After another half-hour of waiting the leader became very uneasy.

"Durned ef this sorter thing don't beat me," said he. "I'd like to know w'ot in thunder has got inter those cusses to make 'em stay so. Reckon I'll hev to go and take a squint around myself. But I mean to make a sure thing o' you, young man, afore I start. I can't afford to hev you walkin' off jest yet."

He bound the legs of the prisoner as securely as his arms were bound, and went off grumbling.

Only a few embers were then left of the fire, and Kenyon found himself in the darkness, as well as alone.

The continued absence of the men who had gone after wood was singular, to say the least of it, and it inspired him with a faint hope of regaining his liberty.

If he could get rid of his bonds he might effect his escape, as the darkness would greatly aid him, and the only chance to get loose was to cut the cords that tied his hands behind his back, by rubbing them against some sharp edge of rock.

He was getting ready to make this effort, and putting himself into position for the purpose, when he heard steps in the tunnel.

"No use," he muttered. "They are coming back."

CHAPTER IX.

"ONE AT A TIME."

KIT KENYON had friends at Chuckaluck—one friend in particular, who was true and reliable.

Belle Bush had reason to believe that when

he returned from his ghost-hunt he would come to her and report the result of the expedition; but, as the hours passed away, and she saw nothing of him, she became uneasy, and was convinced that something had occurred to detain him.

At last she aroused Wo Sing, and forced him to go in search of Jake Nemo, who had passed in the camp under the name of Samson.

When the Chinaman had discovered him and brought him to her, she told him of Kenyon's purpose and his continued absence, and expressed the fear that he had got into trouble.

"It looks that way," replied Nemo. "If it was any ordinary trouble, we might rely upon him to come clear of it; but this may be something out of the way. More than one person in Chuckaluck knows that he has been winning a great deal of money, and some roughs may have laid for him and piled on him. I have no fear that the ghost has grabbed him."

"Perhaps he has been killed," suggested Belle.

"It is possible. There would be a scrimmage before any crowd could take him, and that would be sure to leave its signs."

"May I rely upon you to do what you can for him, Jake?"

"Of course you may, and I suppose I can do as much in that line as any man. It would hardly be worth while to attempt anything to-night; but I will watch for him, and if he is not in camp before morning, I will go after him. I can at least find out what has become of him."

The dwarf went through the town in search of his friend and poker partner, and made inquiries concerning him; but it was clear that he had not yet got back.

Early in the morning Nemo went to the place where Kenyon was accustomed to sleep, and learned that he had not been there. Then he was sure that something out of the way had happened, and he set out in the direction of Charley Manson's grave.

His task was easy enough at the start, as he knew the precise locality that Kenyon had proposed to visit, and had only to follow the road to get there.

When he reached the place he saw no sign in the road or its neighborhood of any unusual occurrence, and turned his steps toward the grave that had lately become so notorious.

As he approached the spot he walked slowly, and looked ahead anxiously, fearing that he might see the body of his friend stretched upon the turf there; but his spirits rose when he was convinced that there was nothing of the kind in sight.

He examined the ground carefully, and soon discovered the signs of a "scrimmage" which he had been expecting to find.

The grass was trampled and torn up about the grave, and the soft ground plainly showed where a man had fallen, and had been pounced upon. No blood-marks were to be seen anywhere, though Nemo looked for them carefully.

"They have not killed him," said Nemo, in a tone of relief—"not here, at least. They must have sneaked up on him and taken him un-awares, though it is strange that they could do

that trick to such a man as Kenyon. But I may hope that he is alive, and all I have to do is to follow the trail."

He had done some wonderful trailing in his time, this withered little man, and it was not at all difficult for him to follow the party he was pursuing, especially as they had made no attempt to cover their tracks.

The trail led him direct to the old Hard Luck Mine, and there were signs at the mouth to show that the party had gone in there.

He knew that Kenyon had not been carrying his recent earnings upon his person, and it was easy enough to guess that the man who entrapped him intended to hold him as a prisoner for the purpose of extorting money from him.

"They won't have an easy time at that game," muttered Nemo, "and I will be apt to take a hand pretty soon."

Without stopping to consider the matter further he entered the tunnel, and went on with noiseless and catlike tread until the darkness was faintly illuminated by the glow of a light from a side drift.

He cautiously moved forward to the drift, and peered around the corner of the rock.

Then he saw Kit Kenyon, sitting bound near a small fire, and with him were three masked and rough-looking men.

"I think I could do it," he said to himself, as he partly drew a pistol. "But I reckon I had better wait a bit and see what will turn up."

As he waited he listened to what they were saying in the drift.

"I tell you we've got to hev that money afore you git away from here," said one of the men. "Ef you don't fix things so's we kin lay our hands onto it, thar's hard times ahead for you."

"Then I am bound to know what hard times means," replied Kenyon. "I wish I had a cigar."

After a brief interval of silence, the man who had spoken to Kit ordered one of the others to go out and get some wood.

"That's my game," muttered the dwarf, and he made his exit from the tunnel as silently as he had entered it, but more swiftly.

As soon as he reached the open air he jerked off his coat, made a roll of it, and jumped behind a large tree near the mouth of the tunnel.

One of the roughs came out of the mine, and looked about for fragments of wood. In his search he came near the large tree.

The dwarf silently stepped out behind him, and threw the coat over his head, drawing it tightly back to the arms. At the same time he tripped the man, so that he fell heavily upon the ground.

"If you make a bit of noise I will blow your brains out," threatened Jake, as he set his knee on the breast of the fallen man.

Finding him docile under this treatment, he quickly tied his hands, and gagged him with a strip of his own clothing. Then he ordered him to rise, and at the muzzle of a pistol directed him to station himself with his back against a young tree, just out of sight of the mine.

He made the man fast to the sapling with his own belt, and left him there to meditate on the chances and changes of life.

"One at a time is the easiest way," said the dwarf, as he again concealed himself near the mouth of the tunnel. "It is a safe bet that another cuss will soon come out to look for that one."

He had to wait to realize this expectation; but his patience was rewarded in time.

Another rough came out of the tunnel, and it was plain that he was not looking for wood but for his companion.

Nemo tried on this man the game which had been so successful with the other, but did not trip him so easily, and his struggle compelled the dwarf to knock him in the head with the butt of a revolver.

The fellow dropped to the ground, and as he had been stunned so that he was easy to manage, the dwarf soon had him tied and gagged. Then he dragged him out of sight of the mine, showing a strength that could not have been expected from a person of his size and build.

"Only one more to come," he said, as he went back to the mine.

This time he did not conceal himself behind the big tree, but took a station near the mouth of the tunnel. As there was but one more left, it did not matter how much noise he might make.

The leader of the roughs at last came out, but more cautiously than the others had come. He had reason to believe that something had happened to them, and naturally was on the lookout for danger.

His caution was needed, but there was not enough of it to keep him from running into a similar scrape.

As he emerged he was met by Jake Nemo and a leveled revolver, and was ordered to drop his pistol and throw up his hands.

He hesitated about obeying this order, noticing the small size of the man who delivered it; but the dwarf undoubtedly had the drop on him and his face showed that he was willing to shoot.

The rough did as he was ordered to do, and obeyed the further command to lie down with his face to the ground, in which position Nemo speedily pinioned his hands and feet.

Then the dwarf ran into the tunnel, calling Kenyon by name.

He was answered by a cheerful hail, and in a few minutes he was at the side of his friend.

"Is this really you, Jake?" demanded the young man. "It is so dark in here now that I can hardly make you out."

"It's nobody else, my boy," replied Nemo, as he hastened to cut the cords that bound his friend's hands and feet.

"What has become of those chaps who brought me here?"

"They are safe enough, tied up outside."

"Jewhillikens! Well, Jake, I must say that you are a stunner from Stunnerville. I want to take a look at them."

The two men left the mine, and Kenyon, as he looked at the discomfited roughs, was lost in admiration of his friend's strategy and skill.

"Do you want to make them tell who put them up to this game?" asked Jake.

"No; I am pretty well satisfied on that point."

"All's well that ends well," and I don't propose to make any fuss."

"Then we had better take possession of their tools and turn one of them loose to look after the others."

This was done, and the friends walked back to Chuckaluck in a merry mood.

On the way Kenyon asked the dwarf how he had happened to take it into his head to hunt a ghost-hunter.

"It was Miss Bush who sent me out," replied Nemo.

"Oh! I might have guessed it. She will do to bet on. I owe her one for that."

When they reached Chuckaluck they went direct to the Gay and Happy where they found John Burke and Sam Byles.

Kenyon, who looked at Burke closely as they entered, was sure that he changed color; but he stepped forward gayly and gave them a hearty welcome.

"Where were you last night?" he asked. "I was expecting to see you here."

By way of reply Kit told what had happened to him just as it occurred, except that he made no mention of the manner of his release.

"How did you get away from the scoundrels?" demanded Burke.

"You could never guess, major," answered Kit. "I got outside of them."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I swallowed them!"

CHAPTER X.

BELLE BUSH'S DEFIANCE.

AFTER Kenyon and his companion had left the Gay and Happy, Sam Byles took his principal aside for a quiet confab.

"Was that game one of your natching, major?" he asked.

"What game?"

"You know what I mean. Trapping Kit Kenyon and carrying him off to squeeze his money out of him."

"Well, Sam, I did have a hand in that. I put those men up to it, and the game would have worked well with anybody but Kenyon; but he is the devil for luck. I would give something to know how he got away."

Sam Byles shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid that I shall have to cut loose from you, major," he said. "You have not only got into a run of bad luck, but it looks to me as if you were going crazy. You have done more fool things lately than I would ever have supposed you could do, and this last game gives you away completely."

"I don't see that, Sam. The game was a good one, though luck was against me. Those men were to do the job on shares, and they will never tell, and nobody will know that I had anything to do with it."

"You must be blind to say so. The chances are that the men were made to tell, and Kenyon suspects you. I could easily see that in his face."

"I sha'n't worry my head about it, anyway, and I mean to manage my business to suit myself, Sam Byles."

But John Burke was worried, and he showed

that he was. He was gloomy and restless during the day, and his gruff and surly manners caused him to be generally avoided.

Late in the afternoon, as he was looking out of a back window of his saloon, he saw Belle Bush leave the rear of The Chromo and take an unfrequented path that would lead her away from the town.

He hastened out, made a short circuit, and joined her as if accidentally.

"I am very glad to meet you, Miss Bush," he said. "I have wanted to see you and have a quiet talk with you about yourself."

"What have you to say to me, Mr. Burke?" she asked, as there came again into her face the hard and fixed look which he might have seen there once before.

"I want to say that Chuckaluck is no place for a young lady like you. It is too rough and uncertain. The men here have treated you very well so far; but some of them may go wild at any time, and then they will be apt to make it hot for you."

"I do not fear them, sir."

"But you ought to fear them, and I fear them for you. If you are bound to stay here you should have a protector. You should give some good and able man the right to protect you. I wish you would give me that right. I have admired you since I first saw you, and now I am half-crazy with my love of you. Nobody here would be better able to take care of you, and I am a rich man, and all I have shall be yours."

The girl halted. They were out of sight of Chuckaluck, and probably out of hailing distance.

There could be no doubt that John Burke was sincere in his declaration, and in dead earnest. His manner proved this, and the color that had rushed into his face confirmed the evidence. Yet not the faintest tinge of a blush came to her cheek, and she gazed at him with such an icy stare as might easily have told him that his passion was nothing to her.

"Are you sure that you are a rich man, Mr. Burke?" she coldly asked.

This point-blank query, following his outburst so closely, embarrassed him a little.

"I am generally supposed to be a rich man," he replied. "Do you doubt it?"

"I understand that you have been losing very heavily at cards."

"So you got hold of that? Well, I reckon I have not lost enough to break me. I have a good lot of property here, and I own a big pile of stock in the Chuckaluck Mine."

"I happen to know, Mr. Burke, as I suppose you do, that the Chuckaluck Mine is a failure, and that work is only kept up for the purpose of getting more money from the eastern stockholders. When the bottom falls out of that mine, Chuckaluck will soon be deserted, and what will your property here be worth then?"

"I didn't suppose that you were so keen about money," grumbled Burke.

"There is another point," she said. "I have romantic ideas, and if I should marry I would want my husband to be a bold and dashing fellow—a road-agent, or something of the sort!"

"That is right into my hand!" he eagerly exclaimed. "I have been in that business, and am thinking strongly of taking it up again."

"I think you had better do so. Anything that will take you out of my sight."

"What do you mean by that, Miss Bush?"

"I want you to understand me plainly. If you were as rich as Croesus, and the boldest brigand that ever robbed a peaceable traveler, I would no more think of marrying you than I would think of marrying a wolf or a rattlesnake. I could never marry a cowardly murderer."

"Why do you call me a cowardly murderer?" he demanded, as the flush of anger rose to his face.

"I do not know how many murders you have committed," she replied, "and I suppose you would not care to count them; but I have heard of one case since I came here, and it would be hard to imagine a meaner and more cowardly murder!"

"What are you speaking of?"

"Of the cruel and wanton killing of a young stranger whom you were cheating at a gambling game. You were turned loose after you had committed the crime; but I believe that you will yet be punished for it. It seems that the ghost of your victim has come back to haunt you, and I hope it may continue to haunt you until it drives you into your grave. For my part, I have nothing but contempt and detestation for such a heartless and cowardly murderer!"

John Burke writhed under the cutting lash of her words. As she spoke, his face turned fiery red, and then ashy pale. When she mentioned the ghost he shivered as if he was struck by a chill. As she finished her defiance he turned upon her in a fury of passion, and his tall form fairly towered over her.

"Do you dare to say such things to me?" he demanded, in a harsh and husky voice.

"You have heard what I dared to say," she answered.

"Why, girl don't you know that I could take you with one of my hands and crush you where you stand?"

"Are you sure that you could?"

"What is to hinder me?"

"I am to hinder you," she replied, stepping back a pace or two.

As she did so she produced a handsome revolver, richly mounted and with a shining barrel. Its beauty, however, did not conceal its deadly nature as she quickly cocked it and leveled it at his breast.

"I have this," she said, "and I know how to use it. I could shoot you where you stand, but I do not want to kill you. Your time has not yet come. The best thing you can do is to walk off and leave me, and I will go my way. You see that I am even with you, if not a little ahead at this moment."

Burke tried to laugh, but the effort was a manifest failure.

"I ain't afraid of your popgun," said he, "I had no idea of hurting you, and don't want to hurt you. I made you a fair offer, and you insulted me shamefully, and that ends the matter."

He walked away toward Chuckaluck, and she followed him at her leisure.

John Burke was in even a worse humor than ever during the rest of the day, and until the Gay and Happy was closed at night. He was shunned by gamblers and guzzlers alike, and even Sam Byles kept away from him. He sought to raise his spirits by pouring whisky down his throat; but the more he drank the more sullen and morose he became, and the fiery drafts did not seem to quiet his nerves or affect his brain.

When the house was closed he went to bed in his room up-stairs, and after awhile he slept; but he tumbled and tossed about as if his slumber was haunted by bad dreams.

At last he was awakened by a cold air that blew upon his face and chilled him to the bone.

He started up in bed, and a fearful sight met his astonished gaze.

The walls of the house, which were of rough plank, were covered with white muslin instead of lath and plaster, and on the wall beyond his bed, and at the left, suddenly appeared a human figure—if it could be called human—in a circle of light that shone with unearthly radiance in the darkness of the room.

It was the same figure that he had seen twice before—once at the young stranger's grave, and once in the valley at the other side of the road—the ghostly figure of Charley Manson.

He was in such a dazed condition that he could not clearly make out its features or the details of its form; but he recognized it plainly enough, and on its breast he saw the blotch of blood.

By a supreme effort he snatched a revolver from under his pillow, cocked it with a trembling hand, and fired at the figure on the wall.

Instantly it vanished, and its disappearance was followed by a peal of weird laughter that seemed to fill the room with its echoes.

Sam Byles, who slept in an adjoining apartment, came running in at the sound of the shot.

"What is the matter, major?" he demanded.

Receiving no answer, he struck a light, and found Burke insensible in the bed.

It was no easy task to revive the stricken man, and when he came to his senses he was still almost stupefied.

"What's up, major?" again demanded Sam.

"Did you fire that shot?"

"Yes. It came here to see me, and I fired at it."

"What came here?"

"The ghost. I want to go into your room, Sam, and sleep with you."

"Come along, then. I must say, old man, that you are in a bad way."

CHAPTER XI.

JOHN BURKE PLAYS TRUMPS.

It was a common remark in Chuckaluck the next day that Major Burke looked as if he had been drawn through a knot-hole.

He appeared to be a changed man throughout, and not in any respect changed for the better. In the space of a few days he had grown thinner and apparently much older. His face and form

showed the ravages of a secret dread or a harrowing anxiety. But it was in his temper that the change was most plainly and unpleasantly visible. He made himself so disagreeable to all the guests of the Gay and Happy that the custom of the once popular saloon began to fall off rapidly.

Before noon he left the Gay and Happy, and did not return until near the close of day.

Then he took Sam Byles into a private room up-stairs for a secret consultation.

"Sam," he said, "I am going to quit this place."

"The saloon, do you mean?"

"Yes, and Chuckaluck, too."

"Going to sell out?"

"No; not yet, at least. The fact is, Sam, that I am a great deal worried."

"You look it, major. I never saw a man show it more."

"I have got into a run of bad luck, and it is getting worse and worse, and that ghost business is too much for me. I am ashamed to say that I am going to run away from the ghost, but that is about the size of it."

"The ghost may follow you," suggested Sam.

"I don't believe it will. When I get well away from that cursed grave I think I will be safe, and then my luck may change. I am going into the hills, Sam."

"To go into the old business again, major?"

"I may strike out and make a raise in that line. I am going into the hills, anyhow, and I mean to take that girl with me."

"What girl? Not the Chromo girl?"

"Just that one."

Byles shook his head and looked at his chief as if he were again questioning his sanity.

"Do you mean to say that she wants to go with you?" he asked.

"No; I am just going to take her."

"Better think twice before you go into such a scheme as that, major. You will have all Chuckaluck against you."

"What do I care for all Chuckaluck? The camp will soon be played out, and I mean to shake it in time. All Chuckaluck may whistle for me when I once get loose. I tell you, Sam Byles, I am crazy for that girl. I had a talk with her yesterday and told her so, and asked her to marry me, and made her as fair an offer as I could. What do you think she did? She scorned and insulted me. She called me a cowardly murderer, and declared that she would sooner marry a wolf or a rattlesnake. Do you suppose that I will submit to being despised and spit upon by such a chit as that? No; I would carry her off if it was only out of spite. I mean to do it, too. The business is all arranged. Some of my old pards will be in here to-night, and then she may bid good-by to The Chromo."

"If you will, I reckon you will; but you must count me out, major."

"Why so?"

"You can't get me into any such scrape. I will stay here and take care of the saloon if you want me to; but you must count me out of that scheme."

"You won't blow on me, Sam?"

"Of course not. You have been a good friend to me, and I will never go back on you; but I can't go forward with you any further."

At night a few rough-looking men dropped in at the Gay and Happy, whose faces were not known in Chuckaluck. But such strangers were no rarity in the camp, and the presence of these was not noticed.

It might have been noticed, however, that they remained and that they called for liquor at the bar as they pleased, without paying for it.

Chuckaluck kept late hours, but did not run all night. Even the gamblers and guzzlers required some rest, and the saloons needed to be cleaned up, even if the barkeepers did not need sleep.

It was along in the small hours of the morning that the Gay and Happy was shut up. The Chromo had been closed some time before, and the main street was deserted or nearly so.

Then the four strangers who had remained at the Gay and Happy sallied forth and placed themselves about the adjoining building, as if following a plan that had been previously arranged.

One of them was stationed at the front door of The Chromo, another at the side that overlooked vacant ground, and the remaining two went to the back door.

With the contingent last named was John Burke, and he directed their movements, which were rapid and effective.

As the key was in the lock on the inside, a burglar's tool was used to turn it, and the door was opened noiselessly.

The Chinaman, who was asleep in the back room, was bound and gagged before he had a chance to make a noise, and Burke and another, taking off their boots, crept silently up-stairs to Belle Bush's room.

Her door was locked on the inside, as that down-stairs had been, and was easily opened; but the slight sound was sufficient to awake her, and she started up.

Before she could even scream Burke had seized her and covered her mouth with his hand, and a cloth was quickly tied over her face, so as to effectually prevent her from making an outcry.

She could not speak, but her eyes plainly told what she thought of the outrage.

A search was made for weapons, and her pistol was found under the head of her bed and taken away.

"You know me," said John Burke, as he looked at her savagely. "I mean business, and will have no fooling. You're going on a journey. If you will mind what I tell you, we will go out of the room while you dress. You must promise not to take that cloth off your face, and not to go near that window. Do you promise that?"

She nodded her head.

"You had better keep your promise. If you try to play any tricks, I will be in there quicker than you can wink. You must hurry, too, or I will come in before you are ready."

The two men stepped outside, and nearly closed the door.

There was nothing for Belle to do but obey

the commands of her captor, no matter what his purpose might be. If she could not dress herself, those men would come in again, and rougher hands than her own would do the task.

She hastily threw on her most serviceable garments, and in a few minutes was properly dressed.

"I am glad to find you so obedient," said Burke, as he re-entered the room. "I hope you will continue so; and you will, if you know what is good for you. If you want to take any more things, you may make a bundle of them, but you must be quick about it, as I have no time to spare."

She picked out a few garments, and rolled them up, probably more with the view of gaining time and considering her situation than because she expected to need the things.

"That will do," said Burke. "You are too slow in your motions to suit me. Now I must tie your hands to keep you from pulling off that cloth just when I don't want you to. But that won't last long, and you will soon have a chance to talk, if not to scratch."

She made no useless attempt at resistance or remonstrance, but quietly submitted to the tying; and then, obeying Burke's orders, followed him down-stairs and out of the house.

The Chinaman was left lying there, bound and gagged, and the door was locked on the outside with the same tool that had been used to open it.

John Burke and his four men led their fair captive through the darkness to a glen not far from the town, where a stout two-horse wagon was waiting for them.

Belle was assisted into the wagon, and was seated opposite John Burke. The other men got in, and the team was driven away, soon reaching a road along which the horses were urged at a good rate of speed.

The road was a rough one, and the wagon had no springs, and its jolting was anything but comfortable; but this was a small matter to the unfortunate girl compared with the appalling fact that she was in the power of one whom she must consider her deadly enemy.

After awhile the cloth was removed from her face, her hands were unbound and she was free to speak, if not to act.

Naturally she began to use the only weapon that was left to her—her tongue.

"Of course you know that you are a scoundrel," she said. "It would be needless to tell you that."

"You may abuse me as much as you please," he replied. "You can't call me any worse names than those you gave me when I first saw you. I know that I've got you and mean to keep you, and that is all I care about."

"You will not keep me long," she retorted.

"Indeed! I would like to know how you expect to get away."

"I can at least die."

"I shall take care that you don't do anything of the sort."

CHAPTER XII.

BELLE'S STRATEGY.

BELLE BUSH made no further attempt to tongue-lash the man who had lawlessly taken

possession of her. There was nothing to be gained by that, and she had enough to think of in considering the predicament in which she was placed.

Of all the perils that had entered her imagination as probable or possible in that rough region, no such audacious and outrageous deed as this had occurred to her. She would not have supposed that she could be taken out of her own house, in the heart of the town, and spirited away so suddenly and so secretly.

But there she was, and she could not begin to guess what would be the issue of this ominous adventure. There seemed to be not the slightest chance for her to help herself, and it was highly improbable that her friends would be able to follow her.

She knew that she was being taken to a considerable distance from Chuckaluck, as the speed of the horses was kept up with no sign of stopping.

When the day dawned, she closely noted the prominent features of the country through which she was passing. She might never see it again; yet it was barely possible that a memory of the landmarks might at some time be of service to her.

Shortly after daybreak the team was halted, and John Burke got out with Belle and two of the men, leaving the third to go on with the wagon.

It was a rough and difficult route that the girl was forced to travel—up hill and down hill, over wooded ridges and through rocky ravines—but always in the same general direction.

By observing the position of the sun, she judged that the direction was westward, and, as she had carefully noted the point where they left the road, she thought that she might possibly find her way back, in the improbable event of getting a chance to do so.

This course was kept for nearly two hours, and Belle had become quite weary and foot-sore when they reached a shallow stream that came from a northerly direction.

Here they halted, and Burke, saying that they intended to spoil any possible trail by walking in the bed of the stream, informed Belle that he would carry her, so that she need not wet her feet.

She protested strongly against this style of traveling, declaring that she was not afraid of wetting her feet, but he picked her up, in spite of her struggles, and entered the water, followed by the other men.

He carried her until he was tired, and then passed her to one of his followers, and so they took turns in bearing the precious burden.

They must have walked fully half a mile in the bed of the stream when they halted, and Belle was grateful for the privilege of carrying herself.

She was set down on a bare rock that gradually sloped upward to a ridge, and on which there was no tree or shrub, nor any sign of soil. It would be clearly impossible to follow any trail over that bare rock.

As she had carefully noted the point where they entered the stream, so she noted the bare rock as the point of leaving it.

She was led to the foot of the ridge, and

compelled to climb it with the aid of her conductors.

It proved to be level on top and was backed by a high rocky bluff. Against the bluff was set a stout log house, and around the house, skirting the edge of the ridge, was a stone wall, which had the appearance of being intended as a fortification.

Entering the log house at the command of her captor, Belle discovered that its only occupant was a woman, who came out from an end of the room that was curtained off by blankets.

This woman might once have been passably good looking. If so, the day of her beauty was over. She was then coarse, frowsy and slatternly, with sallow cheeks, a red nose, and a general appearance of being the worse for wear.

"And you are here at last, Jack Burke?" she demanded. "I thought you was never comin' ag'in."

"I am here, as you see," replied Burke. "Where are the rest of the boys, Molly?"

"Gone a-huntin'. And who is the gay creetur' you've brought inter the hills, and whar did you pick her up?"

"She is the daughter of a friend of mine, and I am taking care of her. She will stay here with you to-night, and in the morning we will go on."

"You don't say. Darter of a friend of yourn? Nice hand you are to take keer of folks' darters. But it ain't no mix of mine, and I won't worry."

"Give your tongue a rest, then, and get us something to eat, as we are hungry as wolves. Make plenty of strong coffee."

Belle was given a wooden stool for a seat, and she surveyed her surroundings, and again considered her situation.

It was hopeless enough. John Burke would be sure to guard her closely, and she could not see the slightest chance of escape. There might be a faint ray of comfort in the presence of a woman, but not of such a woman. Molly was, of course, incapable of sympathy, and would willingly obey the commands of the men.

Belle watched her as she busied herself with preparing food for the new-comers, but saw nothing to induce her to look for help from that quarter.

As she sat there, the girl happened to put her hand in the pocket of her dress, and felt a hard lump.

At once she remembered that it was a piece of gum opium which she had procured for Wo Sing.

She had taken a great liking to the neat-handed and obliging Chinaman, and more than overlooked his few vices. She had no objection to his smoking an occasional pipe of opium, as that indulgence did not interfere with his duties, but seemed to make him more active and willing. Consequently she had purchased the lump of opium for him.

Just then she thought she saw a new use for it.

She stepped up to the woman, who was setting a big pot of coffee on the coals in the clay fireplace, and spoke to her.

"May I help you? I am not tired now, and would like to have something to do."

"Thar ain't nothin' you kin do here, child," replied Molly, as a look that was almost pleasant came into her coarse face.

"I am right handy," insisted Belle, "and I would be glad to help you."

"Well, if you're so eager, you may watch that coffee, and see that it don't bile over."

This was just the employment the girl wanted.

She watched her chance, and when she thought that nobody was looking at her slipped the lump of opium into the coffee. Then she did her duty in attending the coffeepot.

The meal was soon prepared and placed on the rude table, and the four men attacked it with hearty appetites, eating abundantly, and washing down the repast with copious draughts of the steaming coffee.

Belle refused to join them, declaring that she could not eat. She perceived, greatly to her discomfiture, that the woman also refrained from eating and drinking, saying that it was but a little while since she had finished her breakfast.

There was nothing for the girl to do but wait and see what the effects of the opium would be. Would it stupefy them? Would it kill them? What would it do? It was a pretty big lump of the poison, and it must have dissolved in the boiling coffee.

The first indication she had of the reality of its presence came from John Burke.

"I told you to make me some strong coffee, Molly," said he, "and this is strong enough to pull a house down. It is so strong that it is bitter."

"Want some more water in it?" asked the woman.

"No; but you must give it to us weaker at supper time, or I won't get a wink of sleep the whole night."

When the men had finished their meal, John Burke lighted a cigar, and the others lighted their pipes, and they had a comfortable smoke.

Belle continued to watch them, and it seemed to her that the woman Molly was also eying them rather curiously.

After a while they all showed signs of drowsiness; but Burke was the first to yield.

"I am shamefully sleepy for this time of day," said he. "I have lost a sight of sleep lately, and I reckon the tramp this morning has used me up. I believe I will take a little nap."

He laid a blanket on the floor, took another for a pillow, and lay down.

It was not long before one of the men followed his example, then another, and finally the third, and they were all so overcome that they were not as careful in preparing their couches as their chief had been.

"Look out fur things, Moll," muttered the last man, as he stretched himself out on the floor.

Belle looked at them as they lay there, and was half-frightened at what she had done. She knew that they would not awake soon, if ever.

Would they ever awake? That was the question that troubled her.

It was certain that they were helpless then, and what was to hinder her from walking out and using her freedom?

Nothing but the woman.

What should she do with the woman, who was there like a lion in her path?

If she could steal around to one of the sleeping men, she might secure a pistol, and then defy the woman.

That seemed to be the only chance.

But Moll spoke to her, and there was a queer look in her face as she spoke:

"I say, young'un, I dropped onto that little game o' yourn. I wasn't brought up in the woods. But I don't go ag'in' it. If I did you'd ha' heerd from me afore now."

"What do you mean?" anxiously asked Belle.

"I mean that if you want to slide off I don't allow to hender you. I ain't doin' Jack Burke's dirty work so much as I was. What did you put into the coffee?"

"Opium," replied Belle.

"That's p'ison. Will it kill 'em?"

"I don't know. I hope not."

"Well, I don't know as it 'u'd make any very big differ'. They're safe enough, anyway. Thar's the door, young'un, an' if you're for slopin', you'd better slope. T'others may come back 'most any time."

Belle thanked her warmly, and turned to go.

"Hold on. You'd better take some grub. Wait, and I'll fix it."

The woman made a bundle of bread and meat, took John Burke's pistol from his belt, and gave both to Belle.

Again the girl thanked her, and left the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WRATH OF CHUCKALUCK.

WHEN morning came, and The Chromo was not open to the public, surprise and consternation prevailed in Chuckaluck.

The strange news spread rapidly, and soon a wondering crowd was gathered about the closed store.

It was naturally supposed that if Miss Bush had been taken ill, there was nothing to hinder Wo Sing from opening the house and attending to business, or at least giving information of her condition.

There were some who jumped to the conclusion that the Chinaman had murdered her.

Kit Kenyon and Jake Nemo were in the crowd, of course, and the former assumed the leadership of the investigation that ensued.

Going around to the rear of The Chromo, they perceived that the door was locked on the inside, and that the shutter of the single window was tightly closed. It was to be presumed that, whatever had happened, the inmates of the house were still inside.

The shutter was quickly pried off, and the window was darkened by as many heads as could get near it.

On the floor was dimly seen the prostrate form of the Chinaman.

"There has been murder here," was the general expression; but the door was broken open, and the truth was discovered.

Wo Sing was unbound and ungagged, and he arose from the floor, as placid and patient as ever.

The usual remedy was resorted to, to revive and strengthen him, and he told his story plainly and fully. He had been able to keep his eyes and ears open, and had recognized John Burke, though the other men were strangers to him.

Belle Bush's room was visited, and the fact of her absence was made certain.

Then Chuckaluck was stirred from center to circumference.

If there had been any doubt as to the popularity of the mistress of the Chromo, the developments of that morning would have set it at rest. The entire population of the camp was intensely excited, and in a little while miners and ranchers began to flock in from the surrounding country, increasing the clamor and swelling the volume of excitement. It was agreed on all hands that the outrage was a most dastardly and abominable one, and that no punishment could be too extreme for its perpetrators.

What had become of them? was the question in the mean time, and it was by no means an easy question to answer, as the Chinaman did not know what direction they had taken, and they had left no trace by which they could be followed.

Jake Nemo reasoned the matter out to his own satisfaction, and believed that he could find the trail after a little search; but Kit Kenyon had a plan that seemed to promise speedier results, and it was at once put in execution.

Accompanied by Nemo and a crowd of citizens he entered the Gay and Happy, where Sam Byles was found attending to the interests of the establishment.

John Burke's confidant looked pale and anxious, and the appearance of Kenyon at the head of a crowd did not tend to brighten him up.

"What has become of Major Burke?" demanded Kit.

"I don't know anything more about him than you do," replied Byles.

"I suppose you know that he has carried off Miss Bush?"

"Of course I do. Everybody knows that."

"Do you mean to tell me and this crowd that you don't know where he has gone to?"

"That is what I have already told you."

"I don't believe you, Sam Byles. I know that you would lie for Burke, and have no doubt that you are doing so now. You are in all his secrets, and can't be out of this. It will be best for you to own up and tell all you know."

Byles persisted in declaring that he had nothing to tell, and then the crowd took the matter in hand, vowing that they would get the truth out of him, if he perished in the attempt.

They dragged him roughly out of the saloon, tied his hands and feet, noosed a rope around his neck, and threw the loose end over the crossbar of a telegraph pole.

Kenyon and Nemo made no attempt to stop these proceedings, as they were determined to get at the truth, and believed that Sam Byles could tell what they wanted to know.

The victim protested his innocence and ignorance; but the roused wrath of Chuckaluck was bent on dealing with him in a summary manner.

A dozen men "tailed on" at the rope, the noose tightened around his neck and he was drawn up into the air, to give him a taste of what he might expect if he continued obstinate.

Directly he was lowered to the ground, and exhorted in no kindly tones to confess.

"I weaken, gentlemen!" he said, as soon as he was able to speak.

The crowd gathered about him while he repeated John Burke's conversation with him, which was all he knew about the business.

Many still insisted on hanging him, as he had known of the outrage that was to be committed, and it was his duty as a decent white man to stop it; but he was allowed to present his side of the question.

"You all know, gentlemen," said he, "that the major was a mighty good friend of mine, and I couldn't go back on him until I was forced to, though I wanted to tell what I knew. I don't think I ought to be strung up for keeping my promise and sticking to my friend."

Kenyon and Nemo supported him in this view, and he was suffered to go free; but it was evident from the words and looks of the crowd that the Gay and Happy was doomed as an institution of Chuckaluck.

"So the scoundrel has gone to the hills," remarked Kit; "but whereabouts in the hills? I don't see that we are any better off than we were before. Does anybody know where we would be likely to find him?"

"I do," replied Nemo. "He used to be in the stage-robbing and cattle-stealing business, as I have good cause to know. The men who were with him last night were probably some of his old gang, and I have no doubt that he has gone back to them. I know where those buzzards roost."

"Then you can guide us to them?"

"Of course I can. But it is a long stretch to get there, and we will need a small army to take their fort."

It was easy enough to raise the army. Volunteers were abundant and eager, and the only difficulty was in deciding who should go and who should stay at home.

Kit Kenyon was allowed to retain the leadership he had assumed, and he had selected fifty good men, directing them to supply themselves immediately with horses and arms and provisions.

The expedition set out, followed by the good wishes of all Chuckaluck. It soon struck into the road which Jack Burke and his men had followed, and pushed forward rapidly.

As Kenyon and Nemo rode at the head of the column, the former noticed that his companion was unusually excited and remarkably eager to get on and capture the camp of the outlaws.

"I see the same thing in you," replied Nemo, when Kit spoke of what he had noticed. "I think I know what is the matter with you, and

I don't wonder at it. The matter with me is that I am half-crazy to get hold of that scoundrel, John Burke, and see him suffer for his crimes."

"Why are you so hot against him?"

"It is a question of revenge with me. A few years ago John Burke killed my only brother."

"Not the young man whose ghost has been about here lately?"

"No—it was long before his time. My brother Harry was a fine young fellow—nothing like such an ugly and dried-up specimen as I am. His only fault was that he would drink too much sometimes. At a placer camp not far from here—since abandoned—he went on a spree, and made the acquaintance of John Burke, who was running a game there, and was heavily interested in the plundering business."

"Burke enticed him off to the place we are going to, and when he got him there tried to induce him to join the gang. But Harry, who had sobered up, refused, and Burke, probably fearing that he would divulge their secret, shot him down—murdered him in cold blood."

"I forced this story from one of the gang whom I captured not long after my brother was killed, and since then I have been on the trail of John Burke. Of course I might have killed him, but that would not satisfy me. I wanted to see him hang. But he has given up his old practices, has settled down and become respectable, and was careful to do nothing outside of the law."

"Now, if we catch him, as we must, he will be sure to stretch hemp. The people of Chuckaluck have a grudge against him that nothing short of his death will settle. They will take the law into their own hands, and I must say, Kit, that it will be a real pleasure to me to see him strung up to a tree."

"We must take him alive, then."

"Of course we must take him alive. Chuckaluck would never forgive us if we should spoil its sport."

As the party began to descend a hill at the foot of which was a glen not deep enough to be called a canyon, an unexpected sight presented itself.

At the foot of the hill was a stage which had been halted by several masked men, two of whom stood at the horses' heads, and the others seemed to be "going through" the passengers, or forcing them out of the vehicle.

They had suddenly come upon a stage robbery.

"Git onto 'em, boys!" shouted Kenyon, and he dashed down the hill, followed by Nemo and the rest of the party.

The brigands, interrupted in their pleasing task, were quick to take the alarm. Running to their horses, they mounted hastily, and galloped off at full speed.

Kit Kenyon, sweeping past the stage, was in time to overtake the rearmost man, who disregarded his command to halt.

Dashing up to his side, Kit seized his bridle-rein, and jerked his horse around.

The brigand drew a pistol, but a blow of the butt of Jake Nemo's revolver disabled his arm, and he was a prisoner,

"We want something out of you," said Kit. "We are looking for Jack Burke."

"Don't know nothin' about him," replied the man.

"He is at your fort, or whatever you call it. Guide us there."

"Don't know nothin' about no fort."

"Bring a rope here, boys!" commanded Kit. "We will string this fellow up, as we have no use for men who don't know anything."

At the sight of the rope the man weakened.

"I'll do it," he said. "I ain't ready to be hung yet. Ef I take you thar, will you turn me loose?"

"If you guide us there all right," replied Kit, "you are free to leave the country, and you had better do it in a hurry. Ride on between us two, and I reckon you know that you had better not try to play any tricks."

The party left the road and plunged into the timber.

CHAPTER XIV.

A ROCK BOMBARDMENT.

It was near the close of the day when the journey of the Chuckaluck party came to an end.

Before them, at the foot of a slope, was a small and rapid stream, beyond which was a stretch of bare rock, terminating in a ridge that was backed by a lofty bluff.

From their somewhat elevated position they could see a log house on the ridge, and a stone wall that looked like a fortification.

They had found the "fort" they were looking for; but it seemed to be almost impregnable.

Some men were visible on the ridge, who descried them, and pointed them out to others who came from the house.

"Thar's the place," said the involuntary guide. "May I light out now?"

"Not just yet," replied Kenyon. "I may want to use you."

The horses were left in the timber at the foot of the slope, in care of a guard, and the rest of the party crossed the stream, and took a position on the rocks beyond, out of reach of bullets from the ridge.

It was necessary to communicate with the outlaws, and explain the purpose of the party; but this was seen to be a rather dangerous task. A flag of truce was out of the question, and there was no cover to protect the approach of a person within speaking distance. If the men on the ridge should prove to be viciously inclined, nothing could hinder them from shooting the messenger down.

But Kit Kenyon was equal to the occasion. He had kept his captive with a view to this emergency.

He explained to that individual his object of using him as a shield for the protection of his own precious person, and forced him into the service in spite of his protests.

"They know you, and won't hurt you," said Kit. "And I don't mean to take any chances, though my errand is a peaceful one!"

Taking the man by the collar, and holding a cocked revolver near his heart, Kenyon compelled him to walk in advance while they crossed the bare rock, and came within hailing distance of the ridge.

His precaution was appreciated by the man above, who seemed to be peaceably inclined. One of them looked over the edge, and inquired what was wanted.

"We want Jack Burke and the girl he brought here to-day," answered Kit.

"Don't know nothin' about no sech folks."

"That won't do, my friend. We know that they came here, and we are bound to get them."

"Suit yerself, then. I tell you we don't know nothin' about no sech folks."

"Will you let us come up there and satisfy ourselves?"

"Not by a durned sight. Jest go along and mind yer own business."

"If you will give up those two, we won't bother the rest of you. If you refuse to give them up, we mean to clean out the whole gang."

"Fire ahead, then. I reckon you'll git tired of that job afore long."

Kenyon retired backward over the rock, still keeping his shield before him, until he reached his friends, to whom he reported the result of his mission.

Then he turned loose his captive, warning him to make no attempt to communicate with his comrades, but to take himself out of that part of the country as speedily as possible.

As night was falling, the men from Chuckaluck formed a cordon about the ledge, dividing into two parties, one of which was to relieve the other at midnight.

Kit Kenyon, who allowed himself no rest, inspected the sentries continually to see that they kept good watch, and that none of the outlaws slipped through the line.

In the morning the problem of attacking the fort again presented itself, and was as far as ever from a satisfactory solution.

It was impossible for the assailants to advance over the bare rock without exposing themselves to the fire of their adversaries, who were in a position of absolute security, and could pick them off at their leisure. Even if a considerable number should succeed in reaching the foot of the ledge, the only place at which it could be climbed was so steep that few, if any, of them would be able to get to the top.

A portion of the party posted themselves behind such cover as they could find, and opened fire on the fort; but this long-range practice was so ineffective that it did not even elicit a reply.

It was clear that something must be done, or they would be obliged to admit the failure of the expedition, and go home ignominiously.

A council of war was held, at which various projects were offered and rejected.

"Something has got to be done," said Kit Kenyon. "We don't mean to back out of this business and go home to be laughed at. We must get those scoundrels out of there, if we have to blow down the whole side of the bluff on their heads."

He was looking up at the bluff as he spoke, and the eyes of the others followed the direction of his glance.

"That's the game," he continued. "There is plenty of loose rock up there, and it can be got at by a hard climb. Those cusses are not as safe as they think they are."

Ten stalwart miners were chosen to ascend the bluff, and Long Ben Radleigh, of the Chuckaluck Mine, was chosen to command them.

They made a circuit around the ledge, and proceeded to climb the bluff at a point where a spur sloped down to the brook.

Hours passed before they made their appearance at the edge of the bluff and signaled to their friends below, who greeted them with a cheer that caused consternation among the garrison of the ridge.

The work of the miners soon began to show itself.

A heavy piece of rock, detached by them from the edge of the bluff, dropped on the ledge near the log house, where it broke into fragments.

Several men ran out of the house, and among them was a woman; but Jake Nemo, who had a field-glass, declared that it was not Belle Bush.

A much larger piece of rock was then slipped over the bluff, which crushed down upon the log house, demolishing it, and scattering the men on the ledge.

The only chance for them then was to stay as near the edge as possible, and even then they were far from safe, as bullets from the top of the bluff began to drop among them, and their assailants in front began to redouble their fire as they advanced toward the ridge.

The outlaws did not long endure this unexpected style of warfare, but raised something white as a signal of surrender.

There were no negotiations. The Chuckaluck men hastened to climb the ridge, and Kit Kenyon was the first to reach the top.

He looked about for Burke and Belle Bush, but saw neither of them.

"Where is Jack Burke?" he demanded.

"There he goes!" shouted one of the Chuckaluck men near him, pointing to the valley, down which a man was seen running at the top of his speed.

Jake Nemo brought his field-glass to bear on the fugitive, and pronounced him to be John Burke, and a number of men at once set off in pursuit.

The woman who had come out of the log house stepped forward and spoke to Kenyon.

"The gal ain't here," she said. "Jack Burke brought her here this mornin', but she didn't stay more'n two hours. She dosed the crowd with opium, and slid out. That's a solid fact, stranger."

No more attention was paid to the captured outlaws. They were of small consequence compared with the punishment of Burke and the recovery of Belle.

Kenyon almost tumbled from the ledge, and hurried off down the valley, after directing some of the men to follow with the horses as speedily as possible.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LONE CABIN.

WHEN Belle Bush found herself clear of the log house, she descended the ledge without difficulty, and hastened down the valley, taking the route which she had followed when she was brought there.

She ran until she was out of breath, and then it occurred to her that she did not need to overexert herself, as some time must pass before the men she had left would awake from their opium slumber, if they should ever awake. She was possessed by a haunting fear that she had killed them.

She walked slowly until she was rested, and then stepped forward more briskly.

The landmarks which she had noted as she was brought from Chuckaluck by her captors were retained in her memory, and she had good reason to believe that she would be able to find her way back to the road. If night should overtake her on the journey, she was armed, and hoped to be able to protect herself.

But landmarks are sometimes deceptive, as there are many objects in nature which appear similar when viewed by inexperienced eyes, and this fact was to give the girl trouble.

The landmark which she had noted at the place where she met the brook and turned to go up the valley was a splintered tree, and at the first splintered tree she saw she struck off to the left.

She was obliged to guess at the time of day, and consequently at the position the sun should occupy, in order to shape her course; but she knew that it must be nearly at right-angles to the direction of the stream, and she plunged bodily into the forest.

After a while the conviction forced itself upon her that she had as yet seen nothing which she remembered to have seen before, and then she came to a deep ravine which she had surely not encountered as she came.

There seemed to be no use in going back to the brook to take a fresh start. She thought that she knew the direction in which the road lay, and that she could press on and reach it at last.

She turned southward with the intention of passing around the ravine, and had succeeded in reaching the head of that obstruction, when she suddenly came upon a small cabin or hut.

Rude as the structure was—built of poles or saplings rather than logs—and greatly as she was surprised to find it there in the heart of the forest, it at least indicated the presence of human beings, and she wondered if it was inhabited.

Yes, there was a thin smoke that seemed to come out at the hole in the roof.

Would it be safe for her to stop there and apply for assistance? Outlaws went in gangs, and they would not be likely to inhabit such a hut. All men were not John Burkes, and why should she expected to be ill-treated?

As the thoughts were passing through her mind, a man stepped out of the house and saw her.

This man was clothed in a strange mixture of rags and skins. He did not seem to be an old man; yet his hatless head was quite gray.

His face was haggard, and there was a wild look in his eyes that made the girl shudder.

But he bowed profoundly before he stepped toward her, and he spoke mildly and pleasantly.

"There is nothing to be afraid of, young lady," he said—"nothing to be afraid of here. I am the king of this range, and am always glad to welcome my subjects. No doubt you have heard of me—King Harry the First. Will you walk into my palace?"

She hesitated and stepped back a little.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he said, again. "I am known to be kind and merciful. I will treat you like a queen, and will send you on your way rejoicing."

The girl perceived that she had a lunatic to deal with, and could only hope that he was a harmless one.

As it would be best to humor him, she followed him into his hut.

It was comfortless enough inside; but over an open fire was an iron pot, in which was a stew which sent forth such appetizing odors that she was quite overcome. She fairly longed for a taste of that stew.

She smiled as she held out her hand to him, and he touched it with an air of great condescension.

"Before I ask you to report to me," he said, "you must be refreshed with food."

There was a section of a large tree in the middle of the earthen floor, which evidently served him as a table. On this he placed two wooden platters, two tin cups of water and some knives and forks. Then he lifted the pot from the fire and sat it on the floor, requesting his guest to help herself.

She did so, and was glad to perceive that the taste of the stew did not belie its pleasant odor. It was very good, and she said so, and ate heartily, both of which compliments tended to increase his good humor.

When they had finished their meal, he pleasantly informed her that he was ready to hear what she had to say.

Belle thought it would be best to tell him her story, and she told it as briefly as possible, beginning with her abduction from Chuckaluck.

He listened to it as if he scarcely understood it, or as if he were making some fanciful picture of it in his own mind. Yet he listened to it attentively and with an air of interest, and occasionally made a remark which showed that there were points which did not pass his comprehension.

She spoke of Burke generally as "a man," but toward the close of her narrative she mentioned his name.

Then the change in the demeanor of the solitary was sudden and startling.

He jumped up from his seat, and his face was fiery red, and his eyes shot forth fierce gleams of anger, and his entire manner was that of a dangerous lunatic.

"What is the matter?" demanded Belle, as she shrunk from him.

"That name!" he exclaimed. "It is the name of a fiend. I know him well. It was he who murdered me—who slew his lawful king—and he shall hang for that crime yet."

Don't be alarmed, my dear young lady," he continued, as he resumed his seat on the block. "He is not here, and there is nothing to be afraid of. Go on, and tell me how you came here."

The girl soon finished her story, taking care not to mention John Burke by name again, and at the close she begged the solitary to give her the direction of a road that would lead her to Chuckaluck.

"I will gladly do that," he replied, speaking more rationally than he had yet spoken. "But it is getting late in the day. If you should start now, night would overtake you before you could get far, and you would get lost in the woods. That would be bad. You are worn out, too, and need rest. You had better stay here, where you are quite safe, until morning, when I will take you to the road. You shall be treated like a queen," he added, reverting to his usual manner.

Belle suffered herself to be persuaded. She was indeed very weary, and the solitary prepared for her a couch on which she laid down, and soon forgot her troubles in sleep.

She slept soundly through the night, and before daybreak the solitary gave her something to drink. Again she slept and was visited by a frightful dream. She dreamed that Burke had surprised and captured her again. She had striven in vain to escape from him, and he was about to carry her away, when she awoke.

The solitary was seated in a corner nodding.

She quietly arose, opened the rude door, and was stepping out to see how near the day was done, when she found herself face to face with John Burke!

CHAPTER XVI.

JOHN BURKE'S FLIGHT.

THE men on the floor of the log house on the ledge slept long and soundly.

Moll sat and watched them, but every now and then stepped out to look around. At last she saw three men approaching the ledge, and knew that they were those who had gone hunting.

She went back, stretched herself out on the floor, and was apparently lost in a deep slumber.

When the three men entered the house they were naturally surprised at the sight they saw.

"What's the matter with these galoots?" demanded one of them. "Ain't that Jack Burke lying over there? Well, he is a sight for sore eyes, anyhow. But what's the matter with the boys?"

"They must be drunk," suggested another.

"If they are, it is the drunkenest drunk I ever saw or heard of. Let's shake them up."

The new-comers shook the sleepers violently, and touzled them severely, but had poor success in arousing them, until they came to Burke, who started up and rubbed his eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked, with a dazed look at his companions on the floor.

"That's what we want to know," answered one of the others. "We found you all dead asleep on the floor. Were you drunk?"

John Burke revived quickly. He looked around, but saw nothing of Belle, and this, more than anything else, brought his senses back to him.

"No drunk about it," he declared. "I would be glad to know what *was* the matter. I was drowsy, and laid down, leaving these men to watch things. Stir them up, boys, and make them talk."

The other sleepers were finally aroused sufficiently to say that they had fallen asleep because they were unable to keep awake, and the last one to yield had left Moll to "watch things."

The woman was then "stirred up," but it was more difficult to awaken her than any of the others, and when she was aroused it was a long time before she could be made to comprehend the situation.

"I reckon I can guess what the matter is," said she. "I let that gal watch the coffee while it was b'ilin', and when nobody was lookin' she must ha' put in some stuff that made us sleep."

"But you drank none of the coffee," insisted Burke.

"I did, though. When you men had laid down I helped myself to plenty."

"Was the girl here when you fell asleep?"

"That's more'n I know. Reckon I dropped off unbeknownst to myself. But she was here when I was drinkin' the coffee."

John Burke was fearfully angry, but he could fasten no suspicion on Moll or any other person, and there was nothing for him to do but to bottle up his wrath and prepare to pursue the fugitive.

She had a pretty long start, but the chances were that she would get lost in the wilderness, and that a speedy and diligent search would result in her recapture. He enlisted in this enterprise the members of the gang who were present, promising to reward them well if he should regain his captive.

As the day was then near its close, he stepped out to consider whether it would be best to make an immediate start, and was met by three more members of the gang, who were out of breath with their hasty climbing up the ridge.

"We had held up a stage at Deadman's Gap," said their leader, "and were jest on the p'int of goin' through the pilgrims, when a crowd of cusses from Chuckaluck way rode in and bounced us. We scattered without stoppin' to shake hands; but I reckon they got Greeny Dave, as we haven't seen nothin' of him sence."

The comrades of the stage robbers gathered around them, and pressed for details, and the story was hardly finished when a large body of horsemen was discovered on the opposite slope.

John Burke at once guessed that it was more than likely that they had come for him, and he assured the gang that he was determined not to be taken alive.

He had formerly been their leader, and their loyalty had revived at the sight of him.

They declared their intention of defending him, and had no hesitation in doing so, as they

were convinced that their position was impregnable.

But this development of course put a stop to the pursuit of Belle Bush, and it would be necessary to shake off the Chuckaluck people before a start could be made in that direction.

During the night and the early hours of the next morning the outlaws laughed at their foes, and had no doubt of their ability to "hold the fort."

The attack from the top of the bluff was to them an unexpected feature of the affair; yet, when it occurred, they all wondered why they had not thought of it before.

They ran away from the falling rocks, and sought shelter from the flying bullets; but they were beginning to fall before the fire from above and below, and the question of surrender was seriously considered.

When it had been decided that they must surrender, John Burke was informed of the conclusion to which they had come.

"All right, boys," he replied. "I can stand it if you can. Give me ten minutes' time, and I will look out for myself."

The southern side of the ledge where it joined the bluff, was very steep. In fact, it was an overhanging wall of rock. On account of its supposed inaccessibility, the assailants had paid little attention to that point.

There John Burke made a rope fast, reaching nearly to the rock below.

When the surrender was made, and the Chuckaluck men hastened to mount the ledge, that side was left entirely unguarded.

Then he slipped down the rope, landed on the rock, and ran down the valley at the top of his speed.

He soon discovered that he was pursued; but he had expected pursuit, and did not fear it. He was a strong man and a good runner, and believed that he could easily get out of the way of his pursuers in the wilderness, if he should not be able to distance them.

So he ran straight along, throwing out his chest and saving his wind.

He made the same mistake that Belle had made. He hastily turned to the left at the same splintered tree, encountered the same deep ravine, and went to the southward to pass around it, just as she had done.

Just as she had done he came to the lone cabin, and halted to consider whether he ought to stop there and get directions.

Finally he approached it stealthily, and tried to look in; but the saplings of which it was built were well chinked and daubed, and he could find no spy-hole.

He stepped to the door, and while he hesitated it was opened.

Before him stood Belle Bush.

She screamed, and stepped back, shutting the door in his face.

He was astonished, but none the less determined and quick in his movements.

His anger at her escape, and his desire to possess her as his own, flamed up in his face, and he was full of passionate fury.

With a push of his foot he forced the frail door from its hinges, and entered the cabin.

Belle had shrunk into a corner, and in her

place was a man with a haggard face and wild eyes, who confronted him with passion and fury equal to his own.

"Is it you, Jack Burke?" exclaimed the solitary. "At last you have come to me. I have been waiting for you a long time."

"Who are you?" demanded Burke, staring at this strange creature.

"Don't you know me? Have you forgotten me so soon? I was Harry Brough, the man you murdered because he refused to join your rascally gang. Now I am King Harry the First, and you are doomed to die!"

The solitary sprung upon his foe, clutching him by the throat, and Burke, strong as he was, found himself unable to shake him off.

His pistol had been taken by Belle, and he had no weapon but a knife in a sheath at his belt.

In the struggle that followed both men fell on top.

He drew his knife, and plunged the sharp blade into the breast of the man beneath him.

CHAPTER XVII.

LAST APPEARANCE OF THE GHOST.

As soon as the solitary grappled with John Burke, Belle Bush ran out of the cabin.

She might have used Burke's pistol effectively, so as to end the conflict in favor of the lunatic, but was so frightened that the thought did not occur to her.

As she stood outside, thinking only of flight and doubting what direction she should take, she was startled by the sound of horses' feet.

The next moment several horsemen came bursting through the timber, and the foremost of them was Kit Kenyon!

She spoke his name with a joyful cry, and he sprung from his horse to her side.

"You here?" he exclaimed. "This is a blessing I had not dared to hope for. We were chasing John Burke."

"He is in there," hastily replied Belle, pointing to the cabin. "He has grappled with a poor lunatic, and I am afraid he will kill him. Be quick, Kit, for God's sake!"

Kenyon ran into the cabin with Jake Nemo and the men who had followed them.

The solitary was lying on the earthen floor, and his antagonist was bending over him, vainly striving to force himself from the grip which the dying man had fastened upon him.

John Burke was easily made prisoner, and was securely bound. Then Belle was invited to step in and look at her persecutor.

"You are a smart one," was all that Burke said when he looked at the girl who had unwillingly brought him to his fate.

Jake Nemo, greatly to his surprise, thought that he recognized in the dead solitary the face of his brother, who had been killed by Burke, as he believed, long ago, and Belle confirmed him in this recognition by repeating what the solitary had told her.

Shots were fired, and men were sent out, to recall the missing ones of the Chuckaluck party. In the chase of Burke he had been seen to leave the brook at the shattered tree, and his pursuers were scattered to cover all the ground.

While they were being brought together a

messenger was sent on to Chuckaluck to inform the people there of the result of the expedition, and to tell them that John Burke would be taken for trial to the locality of Charley Manson's grave, this being a suggestion of Belle's to Kenyon.

By the time the missing men came in a grave had been dug, and the solitary, wrapped in his blankets, was laid to rest.

Then the Chuckaluck party set out, pushing their horses so as to get through the forest while daylight lasted.

It was night when they reached Charley Manson's grave; but many people from Chuckaluck were already awaiting them there, and others were constantly arriving. By the time they were ready to begin the trial there was a large concourse on the spot.

The preparations for Burke's trial were simple and speedily made.

Twelve good and reliable men were selected to act as a jury, and Tom Dimon, one of the most solid men of Chuckaluck, was chosen judge.

There was no prosecutor, and the prisoner did not need any person to present his defense.

Nor were there any witnesses—at least none who were sworn as such. The facts concerning John Burke's former and recent career were so notorious that sworn testimony was considered unnecessary.

It was a strange and impressive scene where that crowd was gathered at the side of the road, under the leafy trees and near the grave of one of Burke's victims. The night was dark, but a fire had been built to give light, and dry twigs and brushwood were occasionally thrown upon it. It blazed up and crackled, casting lurid gleams upon the surrounding crowd, and lending to the occasion a solemnity which it might not otherwise have had.

The prisoner stood up, and defiantly faced his accusers and judges.

He was as calm and collected as he had usually been known to be, and only the paleness of his face showed that he appreciated the danger of his position. Whatever might be said of the man's faults or crimes, he had never been called a coward, and in the face of that crowd he was not likely to show the white feather.

Belle Bush was the first to step forward. With flashing eyes and outstretched arm she stood there, and pointed at the stalwart prisoner.

"I accuse that man," she said, "of the willful and cold-blooded murder of Charles Manson, who lies in that grave."

John Burke sneered.

"I was cleared of that, months ago," said he.

Jake Nemo then stepped forward, and his withered face shone in the firelight as he denounced the man whose track he had so long kept in sight.

"I accuse Jack Burke," he said, "of the willful murder of Harry Brough. He thought he had killed him years ago; but to-day he found him alive, and finished his bloody work."

"The man was crazy," coldly replied Burke. "He attacked me, and I killed him in self-defense."

Kit Kenyon then stepped forward, and his clear, ringing voice might have been heard far beyond the limits of the crowd.

"I accuse John Burke," he said, "of having carried away by force, and with a devilish purpose, Belle Bush, the Pride of Chuckaluck!"

This was the charge that told. It fairly "brought down the house." The crowd roared and yelled and howled, and impatiently ordered the jury to attend to its duty.

There could be no doubt then of Belle's popularity in Chuckaluck, or of the intense detestation that her abductor had aroused by his outrageous act.

The jury was not slack in responding to the public demand, and a verdict that fitted it was quickly rendered.

"Guilty!"

A general yell of approbation greeted the word, and the crowd made a rush toward the prisoner.

"Hold on!" shouted Kenyon. "Give the man five minutes. Let him speak for himself if he wants to."

The Chuckaluck people fell back a little, and John Burke regarded them with a look of calm derision.

"Nothing that I could say," he remarked, "would move a crowd that is so ready to obey the orders of one man. I suppose you are obeying his orders, when you want to string me up. He has robbed me of my money, and now he wants my life."

"That is a lie!" interrupted Kit.

"It is easy to insult me now. If you are bent on this thing, I suppose you will do it; but you are making a great fuss about a girl who is no better than she ought to be."

There was no restraining the crowd this time. The prisoner was roughly seized, his legs were pinioned, a noose was tightened around his neck, the end was thrown over a branch of a tree above him, and fully a dozen men had hold of it, waiting the word to "run him up."

Just then the men who stood near Charley Manson's grave moved aside, and a startling vision burst upon the view of the doomed prisoner, whose last glance rested upon the apparition that had so often shaken his nerves—the same vivid figure of a young man, with the same blotch of blood on his breast, and the same deathlike face, shining with the same ghostly light.

He shrieked, and closed his eyes to shut out the horrible sight.

The men at the rope ran away with it, and John Burke was suspended in the air.

The rope was made fast to a neighboring tree, and the crowd dispersed, leaving him hanging there, but not before as many as fifty bullets had been fired into his lifeless form.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

THE death of John Burke caused a great sensation in Chuckaluck, only second to that which

he had produced by the abduction of Belle Bush.

He had for so long a time been a popular, if not a respected citizen of the town, that he was one of the last men who might have been expected to perish at the hands of the lynchers.

But his execution was generally justified, as having been nothing more than he deserved. His murders and other crimes might have been forgiven, or at least overlooked; but his outrageous audacity in forcibly carrying away the Pride of Chuckaluck had called for the severest punishment.

It was even proposed, as the crowd returned to town, to visit the same penalty upon his confidant, who was also regarded as his accomplice; but Sam Byles had already consulted his own safety, and had promptly "skipped the camp."

It is sad to be obliged to record the fact that after Chuckaluck had so unanimously proved its devotion to the mistress of The Chromo, going so far as to sacrifice one of its lately prominent citizens in her cause, it was soon to be deprived of the blessing of her presence.

But this was the lamentable truth. She opened her establishment as usual the day after the hanging, but seemed to take little interest in the sales or her customers, and in plain view behind the counter was a placard announcing that The Chromo and its contents were for sale.

In response to numerous inquiries she confirmed the announcement, saying that she had received news which obliged her to return to the East whence she had come. Moreover, she had sustained a shock which had affected her health, and would be obliged in any event to seek a change of air.

Many offers, matrimonial and otherwise, were made to induce her to remain, but her intention was fixed, and nothing could be said or done to change it.

Then there was grief in Chuckaluck, and the inhabitants went about with long faces, condoling with each other, but finding no comfort.

The bad reports of the Chuckaluck Mine, and the signs of "petering out" which the camp already showed, were nothing compared to this distressing intelligence, and disconsolate men began to say that they might as well emigrate.

The evening of the day on which her intention was made public found Kit Kenyon cosily seated in the rear room of The Chromo, and his only companion was Belle.

She was radiant with smiles, as if pleased with the idea of getting away from Chuckaluck, and the state of his mind may be described as uncertain.

"So you were the ghost?" he remarked.

"Yes. Everybody knows that now, and I would have let you know it sooner, if I had not been afraid that you would bother me."

"Why did you go into that business?"

"You might guess the reason. I am Belle Manson, the sister of the poor boy who lies in that grave out yonder. When his friend reported his death to me, and the manner of it, I vowed that justice should overtake his mur-

derer; and that vow has been fulfilled, though not exactly as I intended."

"How did you manage to get yourself up in such a ghostly style?"

"If you had noticed me last night you would have seen the trick of it. I brought here a suit which I had made at the East, exactly like that which my brother wore when he was murdered, and I had my own way of using it. With a little red wool and plenty of phosphorus it would deceive anybody in the night and at a proper distance. I also made a hole through the side of my house and into the murderer's room, and caused the apparition to visit him there at night with the aid of a small magic lantern."

"It worried him fearfully—no doubt of that. But there was one time, Belle, when you were not playing the game, as you yourself saw the ghost."

"That was when it appeared in the hollow at the side of the road. Mr. Nemo took my place then, and played the part well, as he could easily do at that distance. When I came out here I determined to hunt John Burke down. I engaged him to help me in the task, and he willingly did so, as he had a grievance of his own. He believed, as I did, that hanging was the only death that would give the murderer his deserts."

"But how did you manage it last night? You surely didn't take the ghost's fixings with you when you were carried away from Chuckaluck?"

"You helped me in that, Kit. When you sent a messenger to Chuckaluck I told him to ask Wo Sing for a square bundle that the Chinaman knew about, and it was brought to me. That bundle contained my ghostly wardrobe."

"Well, it is simple enough when it comes to be known. So you are going to leave Chuckaluck, Belle?"

"Yes."

"As I followed you here, I suppose I can follow you elsewhere."

"I suppose you can, if you try."

"You may be sure that I will try. Don't you know that I love you with my whole heart?"

"I believe you do care for me, Kit."

"And do you not care for me a little?"

"I don't know but I do," she replied, with a blush.

"Oh, Belle, if you would marry me, I would be the happiest man in the world. Is there any chance for me?"

"Perhaps there might be, Kit, if you would agree to my terms."

"You have only to tell me what they are."

"Simply that you should quit your roving life and settle down."

"That is easy enough. I will gladly settle down—with you. I will take the money I won here, if you say so, and buy a cattle-farm. I am sure I can manage that successfully."

When Belle Bush left Chuckaluck, Kit Kenyon went in the same stage.

THE END.

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